SOCIAL POLICY CHALLENGES
IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

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‘Love for Mas’: State Authority and Carnival Development in San Fernando, Trinidad

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Introduction

The relationship between mas bandleaders and the state suggests more than simply resistance or co-optation, it points to a negotiation of spheres of authority. Here, I examine the ways that formal and informal spheres blend and shift in relation to each other and notions of legitimacy and leadership. Ethnographic data on the meetings between the San Fernando Carnival Committee and the Lionel Jagessar and Associates mas camp show a struggle between formal and informal spheres over informal legitimacy and the authority it creates. This authority has significance for notions of ‘national’ culture, nationalism and participation.

In its attempts to appropriate, regulate and ‘facilitate’ Carnival, the state relies on the authority of patronage, developmental objectives and law. However, the bandleader, King or Queen of the private space of the mas camp and the public space of the road, is already legitimated by those who work and play with the band. Bandleaders clearly feel that, as artists and experts, they hold equivalent moral ground and that the state is not the legitimate authority over Carnival. They must, nonetheless, negotiate because of state prizes and penalties. Carnival also provides a livelihood. Yet, bandleaders repudiate obligations based on patronage. They welcome state participation, but not state domination. In this context, state actors resort to bandleaders’ loyalties to the nation and culture. In doing so, they find themselves forced to appeal to informal conceptions of participation that, in fact, separate nation and state. Attempts to substitute state-centred versions aim precisely to manage and market how these two are brought together.

1 The Lionel Jagessar and Associates mas camp is one the four sites studied for my Ph.D. dissertation on governance and participation in Trinidadian political culture. This paper focuses on thick description of the data gathered in order to highlight some interpretations which are still being worked out and to invite suggestions.
Discussion in the following pages first outlines the beginnings of the Lionel Jagessar and Associates mas camp. I then describe the ways that ‘love for mas’ expresses an ethic of participation, and the importance of the informal sphere and ‘lore’ for this ethic’s authority. I then outline a history of Carnival repression and regulation. After providing an ethnographic picture of a typical meeting between the San Fernando Carnival Committee and mas bandleaders, I discuss some of my interpretations.

The majority of data for this paper is drawn from several interviews with bandleader Lionel Jagessar, and to a lesser extent, partner bandleader Rosemary Kuru-Jagessar, and children Lisa, Larry and Lionel Junior. As well, I interviewed two other Indo-Trinidadian bandleaders, five past members of the Carnival Development Committee and SCC, three current members, and the head of the National Carnival Bands Association. I also interviewed the last elite Carnival organiser before government takeover in 1957. Finally, I collected minutes from almost one year of SCC meetings.

*Look de band coming: Lionel Jagessar and Associates’ Beginnings*

In Trinidad, Indian mas was observed as early as the 1840s (Cowley 1996, 36). In the early twentieth century, it was one of the most popular bands (Crowley 1956, 205-213). Red Indian mas emerged from “Warahoon” tribe of aboriginal natives of Venezuela who traded with Trinidad until the 1920s. Red Indian mas included red clothing and face paint. Fancy Indians derive mainly from Red Indians, but are associated with large, elaborate feather and wire headpieces.

While Carnival has been associated with Afro-Trinidadian tradition and culture, Indian mas has always been popular with Indo-Trinidadians. Over the last century, Indo-Trinidadians would come to play in San Fernando from areas estates in areas such as

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2 ‘Lore’ refers to everyday habits and practices (often unconsciously) passed down from generation to generation.

3 Crowley’s article comprises extensive description of various kinds of Indian mas and can be referred to for more than I summarize here.
Princes Town, Gasparillo and Fyzabad. Since the 1980s, San Fernando has increasingly been considered the centre of Indian mas (Bacchus 1983, 143).

My own observations and the Jagessars’ telling of Indian mas history fit with Crowley’s (1956) view that the costumes reflect “comic books, National Geographic and other magazine illustrations, and particularly cowboy-and-Indian movies”. Indian mas is currently considered “traditional” because the same masquerade is redesigned and played every year. However, unlike Authentic versions, Fancy Indian mas is now designed in any variety of colours.

The Lionel Jagessar and Associates Fancy Indian Band and camp officially started in 1978 and celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2003. In the beginning, the band played Authentic Indian mas. The majority of mas players now wear Carnival style headpieces that could be typical of any band. Whole sections play “bikini mas” with Indian mas styled arm, leg, neck and waist pieces. The band maintains a balance between more ‘authentic’ individual Indian mas characters, self-made costumes with Native American style headpieces, and large band sections with Carnival style costumes. The band’s incorporation of fantasy bikini mas for the majority of players reflects the contemporary era of mas making, the need to cater to public demand as part of running a business, and an ability to incorporate both the notion of ‘individual’ and ‘mass’ (or Trinidad) in one band.

The Jagessers’s describe their Indian mas as “Fancy” or “pretty mas” because they use colourful velvets and shiny sequins and foil. Fancy mas contrasts to Authentic mas which uses less shiny materials and relies more on cloth, beadwork and feathers. Their authenticity doesn’t necessarily imply exact representation, but what Crowley calls “authenticity-plus”. This describes “costumes more beautiful than the originals but still authentic in detail” (ibid, 213). The authenticity of costumes can also be judged not by

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4 Crowley (1956b, 87) aptly notes that “authentic” mas designs are actually authentic to mas interpretations of the original, not the original itself.
their original, but by their coherence with the Carnival tradition of mimicry, adoption and transformation of outside cultural influences, and relevance to contemporary society (Minshall 1985, 12).

The ‘mas camp’ is family-run. It relies on family’s and friends’ ‘love for (Indian) mas’ to produce the annual San Fernando-based band. I show how the state also attempts to harness and control this commitment to participation. Expression of ‘national’ culture therefore becomes a point of negotiation between mas makers and the state. As committed artists, mas makers not only participate, but lead, create and continuously redefine expressions of Trinidadianness. This role carries status. Mas makers continuously reappropriate the notion of Trinidadianness even while engaging with the state as it tries to do the same. These connections provide a basis for understanding the relationship, between the San Fernando Carnival Committee (SCC) and bandleaders. This is a scenario where authority based on Trinidadianness and participation contests authority based on patronage, legislation and facilitation of market imperatives.

Nationalism is usually associated with state-led creation of identity. However, Carnival exemplifies an idea of Trinidad that is not state-produced nor effectively controlled, but which the state is constantly trying to appropriate. Yet, ultimately, controlling Carnival does not necessarily legitimate state authority. Rather, legitimacy comes from affiliating with the informal values of social life. In this context, participation means identifying with the individual, the crowd, public space, informal leadership, and to some extent, headmanship.

**Repression to Regulation: State Approaches in Carnival History**

The San Fernando Carnival Committee is a committee of the San Fernando City Corporation which is the local government body. Among other responsibilities, it sets competition regulations, provides prizes, sponsors events, and regulates the flow of

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5 A room or shed where Carnival masquerade costumes are made.
6 There are a wide variety of people participating in Carnival including singers, musicians, producers, wire benders, seamstresses, bar operators and others. I focus only on mas makers in this chapter.
people and traffic on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. The committee feels it has a clear mandate to decide how Carnival culture will play out and seems to dismiss bandleaders’ own ideas as self-interested, uninformed or narrow.

Mas makers clearly treat the state as a patron. However, this role doesn’t necessarily confer authority. Patronage provides only one of several competing bases for authority. Leadership of people, kind of mas played, affiliation with the nation as people not government, and the making of “national” culture, or ‘lore’, contests authority based on law and patronage. Mas making itself becomes the site for this negotiation.

Seen in historical perspective, there has been a clear change from repression to regulation of Carnival. Attempts to put down forms of masquerading and masking in San Fernando are noted as early as 1859, and again in 1871, 1876, 1881 and 1884 (Cowley 1996). Revellers consistently resisted. There was a significant shift away from abolition and toward strict regulation of Carnival in 1882. Laws and Ordinances in both Port of Spain and San Fernando introduced between 1868 and 1895 increasingly aimed to reshape Carnival into more acceptable forms (Cowley 1996, 131).

The Carnival of 1900 witnessed first steps toward it being accepted by middle and upper classes, and small numbers of Indians, Chinese, Syrians and Portuguese. This more “sanitized” Carnival was now on the road to becoming considered a “national” festival (Liverpool 2001 343). 1919 was the first year Carnival was officially in the hands of middle class organizers. By the early 20th century, organized competitions, letters to the press and Government-appointed committees were all directed toward making masquerading and music (ibid, 353) more acceptable to all classes. San Fernando officially celebrated eighty-six years of Carnival in 2005. Despite the long record of Carnival in San Fernando, it is striking that these celebrations begin its history from the moment of state and elite take over.

From the mid-1940s, government officials and merchants continued to consolidate middle class influence (ibid, 368). Some have argued that it is independence itself, and this associated expansion of democratic participation and cultural self-assertiveness, that weakened the confrontational nature of masquerade (Wuest 1990, 52). With the coming
to power of the PNM in 1956, the Central Government appointed a state financed Carnival Development Committee. From 1957, this committee took responsibility for organizing Carnival and its competitions all over the country. 1957, therefore, marks the Central Government’s steps to officially take over and nationalize Carnival (Hill 1984). Government endorsement and sponsorship was tied to rules and regulations. It controlled all the major competitions and staged events, and universalised an “official” format for Carnival. It was concerned with bureaucratic efficiency, rules, control of venues and police security. Some have additionally interpreted Carnival’s elevation to official national culture as the “triumph” of middle class notions of Canival as pretty mas, brass music, consumption and hedonism (Johnson 1983, 195).

According to Vernon Leotaud, a Carnival Development Committee member from 1959 to 1987, the prevailing ideology of self-government and nationalism fed an increased interest in arts and festivals considered to reflect an indigenous (urban, Afro-Trinidadian, working class) culture in Trinidad and Tobago (see also Koningsbruggen 1997, 125; Burton 1997, 206). The government’s almost sole sponsorship of Carnival reflected the ruling PNM’s closely alignment with both nationalistic and paternalistic roles. The San Fernando CDC’s scope extended from Couva to Point Fortin. Mas players from areas as far as Claxton Bay participated in many competitions established by 1960.

Carnival Development Committees continued to oversee Carnival as part of City and Borough Councils until Parliamentary Act No. 9 of 1991 established the National Carnival Commission (NCC). The NCC distributes responsibility for Carnival to the fifty Carnival committees across the country. It decides when Carnival is to start for Jouvay, Monday Mas and Tuesday Mas. Under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport and Gender Affairs, the NCC distributes money to ‘regional’ branches such as the San Fernando Carnival Committee (SCC). The San Fernando City Corporation controls the SCC and, like the City Council, it comprises nine elected Councillors and three

7 “In this nationalist struggle I am confident that the man of culture has an important role, and that the political leader can only succeed by enlisting culture in the struggle and placing it in the vanguard of the nationalist movement” (Eric Williams. The Political Leader Considered as a Man of Culture. Presence Africaine 24-25: 100). From Errol Hill book. NO DATE.
appointed Aldermen, one of whom is the Mayor. The Mayor is always Chairman of the committee and the Deputy Mayor is the Vice Chairman.

The NCC’s legislated role in Carnival privileges “official” cultural values and “moralistic regulatory applications” (Sampath, 1997, 159-60). As Aching (2002, 74) summarises,

The act not only constitutes a watershed in the historically troubled relations between popular culture and the postindependence nation-state, but also provides government with a hegemonic role as the primary facilitator of the country’s most important public site, event, and display of national culture. For the first time in the country’s history, both the regulation and the official promotion of carnival have been legally assigned to one body.

Aching (ibid, 44) argues that the word “national” in the title highlights how symbols of national unity, legislation and middle-class political and socioeconomic institutions become fused. Thus, the state duplicitously facilitates “national culture” to sell for tourism while “scrutinizing, controlling, and policing public spaces where manifestations of that culture are exhibited” (ibid, 4). Political legitimacy is tied to its ability to control the balance between license and tolerance that Carnival tests. A “clean” (without excess obscenity or violence), orderly parade is considered a success because it expresses vitality, opulence, colour and optimism, and doesn’t over-step established boundaries (Stewart 1986).

The emphasis on Carnival as business collaborates with official pressure for “proper” and marketable visibilities. On the one hand, an “ideology of middle-classization” informs the NCC’s cultural politics. On the other, the control of bands by those with economic power and capacity to monopolise profits from international marketing has also affected costume design, display of bodies, use of public space and citizens’ “staging” of critiques of national life (Aching 2002, 79, Koningsbruggen 1997). “Carnival is big business” competes with the saying “all ah we is one” (Aching 2002, 78). The shift to governmental management, emphases on tourism and business, and the dominance of pretty and
unthreatening mas marks a key historical change from discourses of resistance to those of commodification.

As Carnival is increasingly seen as a cultural industry, state discourse has also shifted to emphasise ‘development’ and ‘management’ and ‘facilitation’. It is this contemporary thrust that I most fully explore by looking at the SCC’s governance of Carnival in the city. The festival’s designation as “national” is used both to give the state authority to make decisions and to promote nationalism itself - through the promotion of certain kinds of participation. However, as I show, notions of participation facilitate other relationships to mas, nationalism, artistry, profit, culture and the state.

Conceptual Approach
Eriksen’s (1992) conceptualization of “dual nationalisms” provides a useful framework for understanding negotiations between the SCC and mas makers over culture and nation. Formal nationalism emerges from the demands of the modern nation-state. Informal nationalism, which is based in civil society, is identified in collective events that evoke shared emotions and bodily experiences among otherwise disparate groups (ibid, 141). Writing of Trinidad and Mauritius, Erikson argues that state nationalisms are poorly institutionalized in these countries’ civil societies. Nationhood and nationality belong, in domestic discourses, to the sphere for ideology, not doxa. There is fierce contestation over their meanings (ibid, 143). There is, in fact, “tension” between state-centred formal nationalism and the informal nationalism of civil society (ibid, 147). Erikson compares festivals such as Divali and Carnival to Independence Day in Trinidad. These informal festivals have “firm roots in the immediate experiences of people” (ibid. 151). They, therefore, more easily produce shared meanings. Whereas these festivals create affinities, and shared practices and spaces among diverse groups, the identity presented by the formal institutions of the state does not. Rather, its ideology “is not credible and therefore impotent” (ibid, 147).

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8 Keith Nurse (1999, 672) colourfully describes this: “Since the 1970s the carnival has been promoted, at home and abroad, either as the ‘Greatest Show on Earth’ or a ‘Trini Party’ and, as such, much emphasis was placed on multiracial harmony (‘national unity’), colourful pageantry (‘carnival is colour’), fun-loving lyrics (‘soca party’) and body-revealing costumes (‘bum bum time’).
I argue that, when formal nationalism and legitimate domination do not convince, the state resorts to appeals to informal nationalism. Erikson (ibid, 156) writes,

…the normative pressure between the moral systems is mutual, but proletarian (informal) values remain remarkably strong in daily practices and discourse in the contemporary Trinidadian class society.

Yet, informal nationalism may not necessarily contradict its state-centred counterpart. Erikson also points out that neither form of nationalism is less authentic than the other, nor less efficient at integrating individuals ideologically. However, formal nationalism must make appeals that aim larger than the state and its symbols. It must appeal also to livelihood, safety, neighbourhoods’ basic concerns and ambiguous or “multi-vocal” meanings (ibid, 159). This can be seen in the interactions between mas makers and the SCC. As Erikson (ibid, 162) suggests, I examine the divergences, convergences and contradictions between informal and formal nationalisms. Carnival is an “archetypical” example of informal nationalism, “where patriotism and criticism of the state are simultaneously expressed” (ibid, 163). State regulation of Carnival has gained legitimacy since independence. Nonetheless, as I show, branches such as the SCC coax, manipulate, dominate and quarrel to convince truculent bandleaders that Carnival is about legitimate state control. The relationship between formal and informal nationalisms is central to these negotiations over legitimacy, authority and cultural participation.

**Love for mas: Culture, nationalism and participation**

Love for mas appears to express a willingness to continuously reappropriate the notion of Trinidadianness even while engaging with the state as it tries to do the same. These connections provide a basis for understanding the relationship, between the San Fernando Carnival Committee (SCC) and bandleaders, which is discussed in the following section.

Carnival is founded on notion of participation and rule of the people. If players don’t come out, the state could organize money, routes and prizes, but the Carnival would come to nothing. Erikson (1992, 156) has, in fact, noted that, “the nationalist ethos of
Civil society is by no means a hostage of state ideology or values relating to capitalism”. People are willing to work with the state, but bandleaders often resent the hierarchy imposed on the relationship. They are very unruly when ready and concerned with subverting state control for their own priorities. As Lionel described, “The people is the Carnival. The people in Town Hall just administering, distributing, telling you what time to come out, but the people, the pan men, masqueraders, the vendors is the Carnival”.

Bandleaders not only negotiate with the state, but with elite business interests. Both dedicate their great resources to taking advantage of Carnival’s money-making potential. Allahar and Zavitz (2002, 139) have commented,

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 the 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 with a capitalist economic structure.

In examining how the nation is being marketed, Green (2002, 283) has also argued that commodification of culture serves the interests of both “international culture industries and the hegemonic international order of nation-states”. This is what is at stake in struggles over this source of national pride. Interestingly, in his case study of a wealthy businessman’s attempt to capitalize on Carnival, Green (ibid, 291) concludes, “No true Carnival participant would be caught dead in Amar’s band. It did not have any history or place; it did not fit into the social geography of the Carnival. He was a newcomer trying to bring slick advertising and marketing techniques into the Carnival. Critics said his band lacked the true ‘Carnival Spirit’.”
Ironically, the characterization of mas leaders as participating not out of a cultural virtue, but only for self-interest enables the SCC to position itself as the legitimate public voice for Carnival.

_The SCC in consultation with bandleaders: Ethnographic Observations._

The following is an example of one meeting:

**Mayor:** Everyone knows each other here by first name and we need to work together.

**Bandleader A:** Who decided the route this year?

**Mayor:** Me and the Police Commissioner. The route can't be changed. We brought you all here to discuss it with you.

**Bandleader A:** Why it can't change?

**Mayor:** We getting business people on Carib Street involved and we can't blank them. What was taken into consideration was plans so I don't have to apologise to the Muslims and Hindus like what happened for City Week ⁹.

**Bandleader B:** We agreed last meeting not to pass on a route that has no prizes. This is we not the Mayor’s Carnival. They letting him dictate and interrupt the culture.

**Bandleader A:** This is not a discussion when we come here, is a domination. Meet the bandleaders halfway with the route they want. We are the veterans, we know what we and the bands feeling.

**Secretary:** Yes, you presented a route, but His Worship [the Mayor] and the Police Commissioner decided on a final route. Yours wasn't considered.

**Mayor:** I never saw the route put forward.

**Police:** Well, I never met before to discuss this. Let’s have a post mortem after Carnival.

**Consultant on committee:** We working hard to return life to the Carnival. We are promoting San Fernando internationally but we are not getting a sense of the reciprocal. We are talking about presenting [Carnival as] a product. All the demands are coming from you. What are bandleaders bringing for when people come here?

**Bandleader A:** What if we produce no mas? What if we take our mas to Port of Spain?

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⁹ City Week, re-established in November 2003 as the Mayor’s state- and city-centred personal project, included Carnival-style Mud Mas and large trucks blaring soca. Taking an unplanned route, some trucks and revelers passed in front of the San Fernando Jama Masjid during Ramadan evening prayer. Muslims present were offended and the Mayor publicly apologized. He then applied his City Week lesson to Carnival regulations.
**Mayor:** [Walking out] I cannot take this.

**Convener:** We need to protect people who come out to see the carnival and bands might cut the route if there are no points there. It makes control, safeguarding easier. We want to facilitate the masqueraders and bands. You are the stakeholders.

[His approach change the mood].

**Consultant:** But we can't make everyone happy.

**Convener:** I think the bandleaders have a case and should be assisted. We will sit down and plan Carnival 2005 early [general agreement to this suggestion]. The NCC treats us like a village. Yet, we have stickfighting finals, Soca Monarch semis, Chutney Monarch finals, National Small Band finals etc and we as a Council feel proud of our plans.

**Bandleader C:** How much is the prize money, how come we don’t know in advance?

**Bandleader D:** We are a young band coming up and all we hear is problems with big bands dominating things. Making me think to leave them. So if the police make a structure, lets follow it.

**Convener:** We are trying to make things work for the betterment of San Fernando.

**Consultant:** Make San Fernando your priority. You have to show your commitment.

**Bandleader E:** If you make it lucrative we will come back [from Port of Spain Carnival].

The Committee itself does not appear to make decisions based on consensus. Yet, certainly, they would not break rank publicly.

When the bandleaders meet at SCC meetings, they usually talk about how they don’t exert their bargaining power enough and never threaten to boycott Carnival. They constantly discuss forming a union because the NCBA doesn’t look after South bandleaders’ interests. They complain that the SCC doesn’t respect them enough and should try to get bigger prizes and fix a route that works for the bandleaders. They dream of the bandleaders running the Carnival. They generally express a lot of skepticism toward the SCC.

The SCC feels it has a clear mandate to decide how Carnival culture will play out and seems to dismiss bandleaders’ own ideas as self-interested, uninformed or narrow. The
committee attempts to regulate Carnival as one member said, “for the good for it…it may not work, but we try”. The meetings don’t appear to be about recognizing as much as directing and controlling Carnival. When bandleaders don’t cooperate, usually the Committee encourages them to be loyal to San Fernando, to work with the Committee because it is working in their interest, and because the members work very hard to organize the Carnival and to raise money. The Mayor may even try to make them feel guilty that they don’t support his ideas.

At other times, the SCC and the bandleaders reach agreement. Also, meetings tend to progress more smoothly when the Convener, a steelband leader himself, negotiates with the mas bandleaders, calls them stakeholders, describes the SCC members as facilitators and tells those in the meeting to make decisions by a show of hands. It is significant that his long involvement in the steelband movement gives him greater credibility and trust than the recently involved Mayor and some of the Councilors.

The route discussion ended with the Mayor telling the bandleaders to go back and talk amongst themselves and agree to his route. He wanted them to consider his position as a facilitator of many different stakeholders and as a politician. He told bandleaders they had to make a sacrifice. As he put it, “This is not about you. This is about San Fernando’s Carnival”. A bandleader grumbled that, “We were here doing our thing for 20 years for only so much profit each year and plenty family and friends’ free work and here he is telling us how if we don’t come into his project we are bad people not supporting San Fernando Carnival”. The Mayor continued, “This is a give and take situation. Why don’t you all work with me. All you want is money, money, money”. There appeared to me to be a clear attempt by the committee to harness what already exists as the festival for what will end up being rewards for the Mayor, the committee, the PNM and the government.

Loyalty to San Fernando is a central theme in his meetings with bandleaders as he cajoles them to cooperate. He felt bandleaders should oblige because it makes the work of the police and other state branches easier when it comes to preventing theft, vandalism or violence. He admitted that the turnover of power every three years, when there is an
election at the Local Government level, makes it hard to maintain continuity in the SCC. In interviews, Lionel agreed, “These new people feel they know how to run Carnival and they would not discuss it with the bandleaders, people who really in the Carnival business. After they make their faults and realize their mistakes, then they come to us. Then, about the third year we would get them settle down, and we can’t even talk about money because we still trying to get them to understand what Carnival is”.

Generally, bandleaders do not offer a unified position to the SCC’s plans. Primary concern is to lobby for increased prizes and expanded opportunities to win prizes. Bandleaders are truculent about the route. They are also ambivalent about the SCC and National Carnival Commission generally. As Mason (1998, 123) notes a member complaining, “They want the NCC to guard carnival but they also accuse them of bringing it down”. The SCC does not always offer a unified voice. However, members ritually invoke notions of loyalty to San Fernando and to Carnival, and ideas of sacrifice and duty. Carnival participation is turned into an opportunity to validate the SCC’s authority. The SCC assumes its state-derived authority should be recognized, and that Carnival’s “purpose” is to make everyone happy. As Eriksen (1992, 67) points out, successful nationalism must legitimize state power while simultaneously making citizen’s lives appear inherently meaningful. When bandleaders remain unconvinced, the SCC resorts to various forms of domination. Legal authority, appeals to all popular bases of participation, and even to informality (“we all know each other by first name”) may fail. Bandleaders may give in publicly, but they do not give up. Points of disagreement may therefore remain unresolved over decades and successive governments.

Lionel felt that increased participation by women and Indo-Trinidadians suggested that “now people understand carnival is for everybody”. Of the four largest bands in San Fernando, three are led by Indo-Trinidadians. The Jagessars’, Fireworks Promotions’, and Wendy and Ivan Kalicharan’s bands are ethnically mixed, but predominantly Indo-Trinidadian. By contrast, Afro-Trinidadians usually make up the majority of Afro-Trinidadian Owen Hind’s band. Explaining other changes that occurred, Lionel said, “In the past mas players was more arrogant, wanted to make people afraid, be a badjohn.
Now we encourage people to play mas. They didn’t realize it would be our culture eventually”. This highlights an unintended collusion with the state’s project to seize Carnival for a notion of nationhood that it can claim and regulate.

The sentiment that Carnival “is for everybody” consistently informs the Jagessars’ approach to mas. Mas is an expression of nationalism or Trinidadianness. The family is Hindu and Indo-Trinidadian, and see Carnival as their culture. Loyalty to Carnival also complements loyalty to San Fernando. As Lionel said, “We born in San Fernando and we are San Fernando people. We never went to play mas in Port of Spain. We stay where we belong. It is also more economical for these bands to stay in San Fernando as playing mas in Port of Spain would involved paying for transport and storage space. Membership would also fall as band members like playing mas in San Fernando and the mas camps are meeting point in the neighbourhood.

As a mas maker, Lionel identifies not only with mas, but with culture and the nation. He described Steelband, Calypso and Carnival as “the culture of Trinidad and Tobago and everybody” and felt that, “religion have nothing to do with your culture. A religion is a group of people in Trinidad. Culture is the complete population”. Trinidadianness is expressed as a choice to participate in the nation. As Lionel summarised, “Love for mas, love for carnival, love for Trini culture and business are all the purpose of bringing a band. I love everything about Carnival. I have to be loyal because I am a Trinidadian. A person can't choose what they want to be. I am an Indian, but I am a Trinidadian and I love my culture. Race or religion has nothing to do with that”. Lionel’s comments highlight how ethnic and nationalist ideologies can coexist. However, as Eriksen (1992, 90) observes, when ethnicity decreases in importance in particular contexts, aspects of modern individualism rather than state-centred nationalism may replace it. Yet, what is expressed here is a choice to stand out as an individual in a particular Trinidadian-identified crowd.

Wayne Hanuman of Fireworks Promotion also reiterated, “We are in it for the love of it. Winning is not an issue. We didn’t even make a profit last year. In our band, everybody is
like one. We love the making of the mas, Carnival culture, everything”. As Wendy Kalicharan tells it, they started a band twenty-five years ago because of a love for mas, love for culture, love for Carnival and because they “like de bacchanal”. Now it is both a business and a passion. In the first five years, they apparently never covered their costs or made a profit. While nationalism also plays a role, she articulated that she is involved because of “love for mas and then a love of making mas and then love for Trinidadian culture”. She says that, even if she sees herself as a Trinidadian of Indian descent, “Carnival is part of our culture”. She complained, however, “people who don’t like Carnival wouldn’t see us as breaking barriers for Indian people so people wouldn’t think we are just backward and illiterate”. She specified that love for culture does not mean love for government and says loyalty to the government is not part of what she does.

Some groups contest Carnival’s status as “national” culture. Indo-Trinidadians, and particularly Hindus, have led this assertion. Afrocentrists have also argued that Carnival is an African, not Trinidadian, festival. Much scholarship has critiqued these essentialist perspectives (Traube 1996, Allahar 1998, Ho 2000). Instead, Carnival has been theorized as historically symbolizing “the constructs and confines of division and nationalism inherent in Trinidad as a nation” (Allahar and Zavitz 2002, 136). Rather than simply mirroring Africans’ experience, it has reflected the changing structures, multi-ethnic social relations, and political and economic conditions of colonial history. As Rhoda Reddock (1995, 21) has written, “…in creole Trinidad and Tobago, the symbols of national culture and national identity emerged from a struggle over representation and citizenship of specific classes, genders and ethnic groups”.

As a range of groups and particularly Indo-Trinidadians sought to redefine their place in the society, discourse shifted from Trinidad culture as Afro-creole or Afro-Saxon (Best 1991) to post-creole (Sankeralli 1998) or Dougla (Kanhai 1999). As Reddock (1995, 21) observed, “Through a continuous struggle and contestation, the authenticity of these symbols is being challenged by other groups and in the process are (sic) being transformed”. Thus, by the 1990s, Indo-Trinidadians were introducing chutney music as part of Carnival and creating “parallel mainstreams” (Sankeralli 1998, 210). As
Sankeralli (ibid, 207) comments, “Previously, Indian participation in Carnival took place within the Creole framework. Indians participated but were alienated from the Carnival mainstream itself. Presently, Indian participation expresses the very centre of this community claiming its space in the post-Creole mainstream….Indians are claiming Carnival space as Indians”. This approach can be seen in the Jagessars’ view of Carnival and their own participation.

Carnival is associated with “having a different type of spirit and strength” where “a feeling gets into you, where you would do almost anything especially Carnival day”. This spirit or love for mas is also nationalist and is associated with being Trinidadian. As Lionel described, “Its like playing pan, nobody in the world not supposed to play pan better than a Trini because we have it in us, I don’t know if it is in the culture but it is something we have. Here the people are born with it, but it only comes out at a certain time, the energy in them. I feel that it is more than love for mas, it is something in us I feel. Because everybody don’t have it too, they might play mas, jump for two three days, but to make mas work mas you have to have a special love and right now I do this as a business. The two combine with me”. Arden Knox, head of the NCBA, also described Carnival as “an outpouring of the spirit of rank and file people. It is important to the psyche of the Trinidadian”. Love for and loyalty to mas are emotions connected to the nation and a notion of Trinidadianness. Business concerns mitigate against simple association of mas and nationhood. Nonetheless, love for mas is clearly a discourse that idealises participation in making culture.

The Mayor did not agree that the relationship between the SCC and the bandleaders is hierarchical. Rather, he sees their relationship as one among equals. He said the SCC showed them respect by giving out prize money early and managing the Carnival differently. Lionel disagreed, “We communicate with them but, they don’t treat us as equals. At certain times, I feel we were equals with them and they understand us how we used to speak to them. We used to speak to them in equal terms and really discuss Carnival, but right now these people are new and they have a problem speaking on that level with us”. Wayne Hanuman of the mas band Fireworks Promotion agreed that the
Mayor and SCC “control Carnival in South”. He felt the Mayor and the SCC had made improvements through the increased number of events they organized, such as City Week. As well, despite some conflicts, he felt they consulted bandleaders. Wendy Kalicharan agreed with the Mayor’s route and felt judging in the city is fair. However, like other bandleaders, she wanted a representative on the committee. This is because she felt the SCC “calls the shots and can pull the wool over our eyes because bandleaders are weak as a group”. However, she admitted that it would be hard to decide whom to send as the representative. When I asked about the SCC’s relationship with bandleaders, she responded, “They see themselves as above us, certainly”.

In fact, when a band is passing, the Prime Minister comes down to the front steps of the PNM San Fernando East constituency office and waves, hugs people and shakes others’ hands. It is a significant moment suggesting he is part of the people, supports mas in San Fernando, is a proud San Fernandian and recognizes that the people look forward to seeing him. As Eriksen (1992, 156) describes, “One cannot be recognized publicly as a true-true Trini unless one masters informal aspects of public life, even if one happens to be prime minister”.

**Conclusion**

Love for mas is an informal social ethic that can be described as a nationalism that is loyal to people while not being loyal to the state. In fact, it doesn’t require any relationship with the state, and certainly not any loyalty. Based in lore, it values participation and, almost, a notion of citizenship based on shared culture. Indian mas bandleaders consider themselves Chiefs in their own rights and leaders of people because of mas. Their character is distinctly and authentically Trinidadadian. As mas makers, they are also cultural authorities and creators with their own sense of rank. This is authority based on lore. Participation among this group lionizes individuality, assertion of self and challenge to authority. Love for mas expresses a Trinidadianness that is ambivalent toward the state and its authority. It is nationalism based on the self-made and self-
defined and self-expressive. This spirit of mas is not relevant only on Carnival days, but informs mas makers identities and relationships during other times of the year.

What does love for mas reveal about how this Trinidadian conception of participation influences aspects of citizenship and mas makers relationship with the state? How does cultural participation inform civic participation? Nationalism in the Commonwealth Caribbean has meant self-government, independence and universal suffrage (Johnson 1983, 193). In the informal sphere of lore, there are coterminous values of leadership, freedom and participation. Even if these are encompassed in the nationalist project, they are carry no state nor government loyalty. They challenge nationalism as a state controlled ideology with notions of Trinidadianness that affirm informal leadership. As Kim Johnson writes, the “mythic component” of the essence of nationalism “lies in the word “Trinidadians”” (ibid, 194). As he observes, this has been part of developments since the 19th century when Carnival, calypso and working class Creole culture began to more overtly express “the germs of nationalism” (ibid, 194).

Carnival presents an interesting case study for examining how culture is implicated in the relationship between ‘lore’ and ‘law’. It is also linked to socio-economic concerns and discourses present in regular, daily life. Playing mas affirms an ethic of participation and identification as Trinidadian. Playing ‘Indian mas’ creates an affinity with the spirit of mas and the warrior character. For mas makers, in particular, these influence their identities on and off the road. It is not only culture, but also practice and emotion that define what is “national”.


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