'Who ent dead, badly wounded': The everyday life of pretty and grotesque bodies in urban Trinidad

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Abstract
In Trinidad two distinct bodies scar everyday cultural life. One is the Carnivalesque – a naked, commodified, and sexualised body of the popular bikini and beads type of Carnival portrayals called 'pretty mas'. The other body is the grotesque – a dead, maimed, and murdered body appearing frequently in news media and in daily discussions on social media as the murder rate locally reaches one person every day. From the mid 1980s to the present, the numbers and visibility of these bodies in the same everyday spaces has increased. While there is no causal connection, fieldwork suggests cultural conversation between two representations of the body, between laughter and grief, jouissance and mutilation, celebration and fear exists in Trinidad. Through ethnographic fieldnotes, historical data, discourse analysis and the cultural theories of Guy Debord, Mikhail Bakhtin, Lloyd Best and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, this article explores the cultural correlation between everyday images (sexual and violent) of the body in Trinidadian society and their impact on the constitution of subjectivity, nationhood and segregation locally.

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) are the two most southern islands in the Caribbean chain and form one nation of 1.3 million people. During the 1990s, T&T moved from a moderate oil-based economy to a globally important natural gas-based one that, in 2004, briefly

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accounted for 80% of all US Liquid Natural Gas imports (Kelshall, 2005:2). In more recent times, changing circumstances, particularly within the US market, has seen T&T encounter more difficult economic conditions. Nonetheless, in November 2011 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) removed T&T from its list of developing countries and, economically, the twin-island nation is one of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the Caribbean, with one of the highest per capita incomes in the Caribbean and Latin America. At the same time, levels of income inequality closely match 'to that of the United States (Gini % of 40.3), the United States having one of the highest levels of income inequality in the developed world' (Smart, 2013).

Trinidad Carnival is one of the most well known Carnival festivals in the world and, with a large, long-standing Trinbagonian diaspora around the globe, it travelled and became the inspiration for many others, including Notting Hill in London, Caribana in Toronto and Washington DC Carnival. Carnival in T&T is a cultural object. Regional scholars suggest its evolution and development from the early 1800s to today as one important way to reflect on local social history and culture (Benítez-Rojo, 1997; Henry, 2008; Hill, 1972: 100).

Another less promoted feature of contemporary everyday life in T&T is a murder rate that in 2013 placed the nation as the 15th most murderous country in the world (Townsend, 2009; UNODC, 2013). In general regional terms, T&T, only 7 miles from the South American coastline, is located geographically in a drugs trans-shipment region where, Gilgen (2012: 9) notes, the security situation is deteriorating, homicide rates are generally increasing, the brutality of violence can be extraordinary, and the number of homicides carried out with firearms is higher than elsewhere in the world.

The grotesque body

The murder rate in T&T exceeds more than one person every day (Townsend, 2009: 18), and the sight of a dead, maimed and murdered body, a grotesque body in the most obvious sense, is increasingly ordinary. This dead body, sometimes described with words such as 'mutilated', 'headless' or 'beaten to death', and often partially unclothed is reproduced photographically on newspaper front pages and linguistically in newspaper copy, presented on the nightly TV news and crime programming, discussed in daily conversations on social media, and found in popular culture such as song lyrics, novels, art and film (Morgan and Youssef, 2006).

These murdered and dead bodies frequently made visible on and across media in T&T are predominantly young black and brown male bodies. For example, of the 269 murders in T&T between 1 January 2016 and 31 July 2016, 90% were male, 62% were under 35, and 76% were the result of gunshot wounds (PLOTT, 2016). Further, five years of police statistics between 2005 and 2010 showed that in a country where demographically Afro-Trinidadians formed 37.6% of the population in 2011, 1668, or 72.3% of the 2307 persons murdered in Trinidad were of African descent, suggesting that forms of anti-black racism exist locally (Kerrigan, 2015). Homicides in T&T today mostly occur among the lower income population and suggest a different climate from the late 1990s and early 2000s, which also included kidnapping and targeting the wealthy.

Picture 1. Front covers of *Newsday*, 29 August 2011 and 16 May 2010.

Violence against the body in T&T can at times also be termed anthropologically as increasingly 'spectacular' (Debord, 1994 [1967]); its performance – as in the harrowing case of 62-year-old US military veteran Balram Maharaj, who was found burned, dismembered, placed in two buckets and buried in separate shallow forest graves, to cite just one of many distressing examples – often public. One understanding of this grotesque performance would be that they have social consequences. For example, they influence how people situate themselves socio-economically in the world and how they assert rights to their own safety. The visual effect of dead bodies, as Caldeira (2000) pointed out in a study of crime and violence in São Paulo, leads to increased levels of social apprehension that, in turn, generate a general 'climate of fear'. In urban Trinidad some note that this climate of fear feeds urban segregation and social exclusion because experiences of violence flatten racial hierarchies and overlook ethnic solidarity to become class-specific (Kerrigan, 2015). By this it is meant many who can afford added security pay for it and wall themselves off from 'others' who cannot afford such security. It is little surprise, then, that over the last 15 years responses to insecurity in Trinidad include a dramatic increase in 'gated-community life' and the rapid expansion of private security firms (Project Ploughshares, 2013). This social reality has also, on some level, entered into the consideration and organisation of Carnival itself. As the society has presented itself as more murderous, pressures toward the securitisation of Carnival parties and bands have increased. This includes these events becoming more expensive due to security costs and concerns.

Understood in this sense murdered bodies may influence socio-economic stratification because 'protective measures', such as private security, gated communities and

Picture 2. Costumes advert from Fantasy.

securitised fetes, are only affordable to some and not all. If protecting oneself and one's family from violence is an economic class issue and not a universal right, and certain groups are left more exposed than others – including at more traditional open and less expensive Carnival fetes – what might this mean for subjective notions of nationhood and citizenship? What competing nationalist discourses might arise because of this?

The pretty mas body

The second everyday image of the body visible and spoken of often or at least for nine months[1] of the year is a hyper-sexualised pretty mas Carnival body promoted by brands such as 'Fantasy', 'Tribe' and 'YUMA' (Young Upwardly Mobile Adults). Often female, but by no means exclusively a female body, pretty mas as sold by these brands is the commercial expression of a modern and commercialised form of Carnival distinct from Trinidad Carnival of the early and mid 20th century. Yet it is the dominant image

Picture 3. Costumes adverts from YUMA.

government and masquerade producers broadcast to the world. It is a more commodified and sexualised body than the pre-1980s Carnivals. Its sexualisation fits easily into the Western mediascape alongside the MTV booty video aesthetic, the heterosexual lad magazine fetishism and perfect insta-hotties on Instagram quite familiar around the Euro-American world since the late 1980s.

This pretty mas body first emerges in the 1960s but does not become central to Carnival until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it replaced and took over from an era of Carnival costuming often described nostalgically by locals as 'the Golden Era of Mas' and a 'Theatre of the Streets' (Ahye 1991; Kerrigan and Laughlin, 2003). Whether it is staring back from billboard advertisements for special interest Carnival bank loans, local TV programmes demanding viewers get in shape for Carnival, websites and magazines dedicated to displaying the latest Carnival costume and its wearer, or newspaper columns arguing for and against 'nakedness', the pretty mas body like the dead body is no longer exceptional, but part of normative, everyday visuality and discussion.

As the press images from Fantasy and YUMA suggest, the pretty mas body is often but not always, a lighter hue than the 2011 demographic census on the twin-island nation would suggest it would be with a population that is 37.6% Indo, 36.3% Afro, 24.2% Mixed and 1.9% accounting for the various groups: White/Chinese/Amerindian/Syrian/other and unknown. What effect does this body image have on conceptions of what it means to be a Trinbagonian? Not least in a situation where the actual bodies seen on the road at Carnival time are much more heterogeneous in shape, colour and age than those depicted in the advertising images for the pretty mas bands? Where are the phenotypically dark skinned and black bodies of everyday life in these adverts?

'Pretty mas' is based upon capitalism – profit, mass production, luxury – and it replaced the high art aesthetic contained in the theatre of the streets Trinidad Carnival was once described to be. The pretty mas body is the symbol and face of the 'all-inclusive masquerade' band ('band' meaning a large 1000/10,000 group of people 'playing mas'[2] together) – and is so labelled because it means all drinks, security costs, costumes, music fees and other Carnival necessities are covered in one price, as opposed to a time when Trinidad Carnival costumes were made in mas camps by per-formers and masqueraders, and not bought by them (Lovelace, 1978). However the all-inclusive band is really an all-exclusive band because the price of participation in a pretty mas band for Carnival in Port of Spain in 2016 ranged between TT$4000–8000, while the average monthly wage in 2016 was TT$5852, effectively excluding the working class from Carnival, their own tradition of empowerment (Nettleford, 1988: 14). This is not to say there are no other forms and types of Carnival participation to be found in T&T, such as village Carnivals and J'ouvert, both of which have traditionally not cost anything for participants and as such have remained more open to lower income groups. That said, in the last 5–10 years some J'ouvert bands have also recently began charging along the all-inclusive model of pretty mas. Nor is it to say Trinidad Carnival has never had elite bands before that were light-skinned and eroticised. Harts is the only band from the 1960s that followed this model that is still around today (Ahye 1991). The difference now is that elite, high-status and eroticised bands have come to dominate the various different forms of Carnival masquerade and presentation in the 21st century.

The all-inclusive band model instantiates class hierarchies by making the ability to participate in Carnival a public affirmation of one's social status and income. Meanwhile, a prior populist and nationalistic narrative concerning the festival's 'inclusivity' and non-capitalist roots as a theatre of the streets still dominates modern government and tourist literature descriptions of Trinidad Carnival and masks the exclusion of the low-income local population.

The pretty mas body here then, the multicultural, often light, brown-skinned beauty that is all-pervasive and ubiquitous in performing Trinbagonian cosmopolitan national identity to the world may itself be suggested and described as the face and symbol of another type of gated community; a nationalistic festival only open to those of a certain economic class. Just like fear of the dead body, the all-inclusive band may instantiate unconscious class hierarchies and new types of gated communities by making participa-tion in Carnival a public performance of social status and wealth.

Imagined community

In an imaginative sense these two bodies, both often partially uncovered, talk at, and across each other through their transmission in everyday life. The suggestion is this: these once exceptional bodies, now normalised, are two voices among many others that influence how people may imagine themselves and the nation. This article allows a discussion of this correlation between everyday images (sexual and violent) of the body in Trinidadian society. What connects these things and what might the connection suggest about the modern-day constitution of subjectivity, nationhood and citizenship in T&T? And how may these bodies communicate and contribute to local issues of social inclusion/exclusion? The state, the media and the individual all provide spaces of intersection and representation where these bodies impact, transgress and de-sensitise complex notions of violence, sexuality and community identity. What are people's responses to the normalisation of bodies often considered marginal in other societies? How are they incorporated into discourse? What does consummation between these two bodies produce, or as Bakhtin (1984) would say, *what are the dialogical relations* between bodies usually considered separately?

Trinidad Carnival as indigenous intellectual device

Despite its similarities to European carnivals, Trinidad Carnival is not solely a European-inspired one (Henry, 2008), but rather a 'spectacle' (Debord, 1994 [1967]) translated by local circumstances and processes (Benítez-Rojo, 1997; Hill, 1972) with influences that include the introduction of peoples and culture from many different parts of the world, including various masquerade and performance cultures from Africa, India, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas (Henry, 2008: 94).

For Guy Debord (1994 [1967]: 15), 'spectacle' was a public display and manifestation of a particular economic and socio-cultural formation. He described spectacle as a form of false consciousness, an ideological smokescreen to hide the 'autocratic reign of the market economy' (1988: 2). His *Society of the Spectacle*, its artefacts and processes, forms and shapes, production and sales was a mask hiding violent and oppressive social control and a mechanism of the expanding capitalist ideology remaking the world. This is similar to the way in which Benítez-Rojo (1997) described Carnival in the Caribbean. Reading beyond its obvious visibility, Benítez-Rojo believed, renders previously invisible mechanisms of power and control in the festival visible (Aching, 2002; Goldstein, 2004: 16; Gramsci, 1971). In this sense Trinidad Carnival is a way to shine light on social change and relations within T&T society.

Nettleford (1988) and others (Ahye, 1991; Hill, 1972) have covered the historical importance of Trinidad Carnival in local politics, nation building and social unity. Nettleford notes:

> [I]n the Caribbean, the idea of festival remains a vehicle for communicating and affirming values and for strengthening the bonds in the new society, but it has changed somewhat through a protracted transformation from colonial fiefs to independent modern politics. The task of nation-building looms large, and the manipulation of symbols, festivals included, has become part of the action. (1988, 183)

Nettleford's work took on the development of Trinidad Carnival since Independence in 1962 and its use as a nationalistic device of integration. He suggested Trinidad Carnival and its many different elements such as J'ouvert, pan, King and Queen, and more were used as a mechanism of national solidarity.

The effects and assimilation of the neoliberal drive toward market freedoms and the commodification of everything (Harvey, 2005) driving class warfare and inequalities began to intersect fully with Trinidad Carnival in the late 1980s/early 1990s and impacted on Carnival as a form of social solidarity as described by many earlier authors like Nettleford. Miller (1994), in his treatise on Trinidad as an exemplar of capitalism, demonstrated how big generalisations about neoliberal capitalism are problematic when trying to get at the specifics of Trinidad because the nature of capitalism locally is distinct; while Aching (2002) discusses the implications of neoliberal changes to Trinidad Carnival in his class treatise on the 'middle-class-isation' of T&T society, the transformation to self, and the implications of the economic transformation – from cultural commons to commodity – for the local festival. For Aching (2002) – and it is an approach this article subscribes to – in the late 20th century there was a Debordian political-ideological manipulation of this once nationalistic theatre and 'spectacle', designed to 'mask' and hide the privatisation of public space (Aching, 2002: 98) and other forms of economic stratification (Ho and Nurse, 2005), a situation that localises neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005) and Debord's (1994 [1967]) ideas on spectacle specifically in Trinidad.

Finally, writing in the late 1990s, Benítez-Rojo theorised everyday life in the Caribbean through a 'Carnivalesque approach'. He said this is important because 'no perspective of human thought – whether premodern, modern or postmodern – can define the Caribbean's complex sociocultural interplay' (1997: 203). This is not a reworking of Bakhtin's 'Carnivalesque' but rather the introduction of the term as connected specifically to the history, stories and situation of the Antilles. A sense scholars committed to the decolonial approach to epistemology vigorously defend (Kamugisha, 2007; Mignolo, 2000).

Benítez-Rojo's alternative sense of Carnival as a metaphor in process – a window on Trinidad society that changes over time as the society does – makes Trinidad Carnival not a fixed event; it is not a story that has been told forever, it is a device that can function as an 'assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984) or specific cultural conjunction (Hall, 1996) capable of revealing, in an allegorical fashion (Benjamin, 1999: 19–20), the multiple intersections and intensifications of class, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion and more, particular to Trinidad at any moment in time, that have varied, blended and continue to vary at different points in its history. And this is how Trinidad Carnival, its masquerades and other festival elements are used in this article – as cultural products and intersections through which various lines of meaning, power, resistance, discourse, capitalist expansion and more combine and are revealed at different moments in local social history.

Benítez-Rojo's endeavour to capture multiplicity reconstructs the global, hegemonic *representation* of Carnival from a singular product in the world, with European antecedents or African ancestry, depending on one's viewpoint, into a diverse form of *communication* and public performativity of cultures peculiar to the history of each nation or island, and the various intricacies and complexities of individual socio-cultural systems. As such, and in combination with Burke's (2009: 271) work, where he points out, 'What

is clear is that Carnival was polysemous, meaning different things to different people', it is possible to intimate, like the late Trinidadian Lloyd Best once did of Trinidad Carnival 40 years ago, that much of T&T's population learned a sense of themselves and their potential for 'automatic solidarity' through participation in, and the allegory of masquerade or 'playing mas'.

> [M]as is not Carnival; Carnival is a central rite which includes mas. But mas is when you are always playing the Other. There are many different Others and you are making yourself like all the Others you have to deal with, for the purpose of lubricating society – for making relations easy. There is a fabulous piece [by another author] that I published in The Review that describes what Trinidad life was like 40 years ago, and how all the people were playing so many different roles at one and the same time. It is not only that mas compels you to play many different roles, so today you are Catholic, tomorrow you are Hindu; today you are white, tomorrow you are mulatto. Depending on where you find yourself, you are all these things. The reason mas is necessary is that you have to do that; but the more intriguing thing is that mas also requires you play yourself in many different incarnations. So you are not only playing the Other you are playing yourself. (2001)

The economics of pretty mas

Once upon a time there was no fee to be a dragon or bat or some other masquerade in the parade (Lovelace, 1978). There were no security ropes manned by beefy bouncers to keep non-paying people off the roads. Carnival costume production was a family and personal matter. You made your own (Sampath, 1997). Mas camps and backyards, as such, have a long social history as spaces of creativty, culture, solidarity and resistance in T&T and speak to the era of Carnival described by Best and Nettleford (Lovelace, 1978). Before Carnival costume production was outsourced to China in the mid 1990s there was an abundance of small family units engaged in costume production for nine months of the year across both islands. Many of these families had a Carnival history of costume design and production dating back to at least the 1950s, yet many no longer participate in Carnival due to their inability to afford a compulsory pretty mas costume. These families are now excluded from the various cultural downstream rituals and citizenship that today's Carnival participants supposedly take part in. Sampath (1997) described the changes to Trinidad Carnival in the late 20th century as a battle between local festival and neoliberal tourist development. With tourism winning at all stages of Carnival – production, design and management – at the expense of local subject matter, solidarity and participation. He writes about the new political economy of Trinidad Carnival, and how many of the traditional Carnival cottage industries connected with it were not supported by the government, which was more interested in the international currency that comes with foreign tourists on travel packages to play in Las Vegas-themed masquerade bands in Trinidad. Today local production mas camps are seldom found in the main cities and only a few remain dotted around the country. Pretty mas costumes today are produced in China and sold in all-inclusive packages that include drinks, food, pee trucks, security, band fee by big Carnival brands such as Tribe, Harts, Fantasy and YUMA and aimed primarily at a select group of band 'members', who can pay or who know the right people to get in.

At the same time, the marketing of 'cultural tourism' developed its 'authenticity versus change' narrative. This helped to mask the social justice question of who from the nation would now become the labour force supporting the new service culture and commercialisation of the festival. The business model changed from populist art form in the lead-up to Independence and into the late 1970s remembered for the theatrical Carnival designs and productions of Carnival legends like George Bailey, Harold Saldenah, Irwin McWilliams and many others, to a more salacious and eroticised pretty mas commodity form (bikini and beads masquerade portrayals) by the late 1980s (Kerrigan and Laughlin, 2003).

The economics of pretty mas can be described in Deleuzian terms (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984) as reflecting the libido of Euro-American capitalism – profit, mass production, luxury, sex appeal and service orientated. The high art aesthetic that led some commentators to describe mid-20th-century Trinidad Carnival as a 'theatre of the streets' diffused into various layers of cultural production, with each becoming commodities for the 'desiring machine'. From the mid 1980s band fees and the cost of individual participation grew. As commodification of the festival increased, exclusivity (participation based on the ability to pay) overcame ideals of inclusivity (participation rooted in Trinidad Carnival as a national commons accessible to all).

The timing of the shift correlates roughly to the upsurge in local petrol and natural gas revenues, and T&T's insertion into global flows of capital and the cultural politics of neoliberalism from the 1970s to 1990s. Neoliberalism is the dominant global economic system of our time. Naomi Klein (2004) has called it an 'extraordinarily violent ideology'. While for David Harvey (2005) neoliberal flows of capital, especially those connected with the petro-industry, not only create new social landscapes but 'construct consent' and discursive legitimacy by appropriating local cultural forms as masks to distort and distract focus from the slick alliances, vested interests and exclusionary practices embedded in neoliberalism. The politics of neoliberalism include: the upward redistribution of wealth, the marketisation of social life and the cultural belief in individualism as the main indicator of personal success or failure. The shift is also an example of what anthropologists call 'accumulation by dispossession' – turning things once communal into things private and for profit. Many of those Nettleford (1988: 14) called 'the people from below', and who he considered the legitimate authors and participants of Carnival drama as a populist art form, were now displaced and became the low paid, service-orientated, pretty mas labour force.

Viewed through the lenses of class and race, the late 20th- and early 21st-century pretty mas version of Trinidad Carnival can be described as a 'gated community'. An analogy for this practical reality is staffing the event. For example, on Carnival Monday morning in 2012 the street parade began at 11a.m. but the staff who service the all-inclusive pretty mas band – the bar and food personnel, crowd control, security, roadies and other staff – all start gathering for 8 a.m. The staff are predominantly from the lower class and almost all are phenotypically black and brown, with a mixture of men and women. Most gathered in the shade at the side of the road before the sun got too hot. Simply lying on the grass catching a few more minutes of sleep. In 2012, a large all-inclusive pretty mas Carnival band of around 3000 masqueraders employed 300–400 members of staff per day. These staff members, depending on their rank and role, were

paid between TT$250 and TT$400 each day to service and work for masqueraders who paid between TT$3000 and TT$7000 for this pretty masquerade 'membership'.

Seen in such a light, the socio-economic changes in Carnival over the last 30–40 years are analogous to a more general process of inequality and economic difference-making in post-Independence Trinidad. In particular, the exclusion of low-income groups from other communal spaces, including politics, employment, nationhood, particular urban areas, security and social mobility (Kerrigan, 2015).

As the 'coloniality of power' reminds Caribbean scholars, such social boundaries to Trinidad Carnival today are by no means new either (Kamugisha, 2007). They were there from the beginning. According to Errol Hill, when the British arrived after 1797, the early European Carnival festivities found here echoed the earliest recorded private costume balls or French planter fêtes, mainly attended by the Spanish and those of mixed European and African descent, with the enslaved excluded. Just like today, at those events the various costumes demonstrated signs of multicultural mixture, particularly of French, Spanish and North African origin. Of course the enslaved were never guests at these balls or those that took place after the arrival of the British. Yet this did not mean they were completely removed from events. At the colonial Carnival celebrations of the elites, at their grand plantation balls, the enslaved were needed for housework, including drinks service, musical entertainment and food preparation (Hill, 1972).

So one story Trinidad Carnival tells us is that any post-Independence promises and inclusive national rhetoric about its development as central to a new nation's growth weren't as liberating as they might have been. As larger global processes became embedded in the local society, mas costume production was outsourced to China, while 'jumpin up' with an all-inclusive wristband became an all-exclusive activity, reflecting similar class-based changes and separations the society has undergone more generally.

Crime and violence in Trinidad

Over the same period, and particularly the last 15–20 years, as changing socio-economic circumstances have come to be reflected in the economics of pretty mas and, specifically, the all-inclusive mas band experience, there have also been increases in violent crime locally (Seepersad 2016).

A facile appeal to 'commodity determinism' (Coronil and Skurski, 1991) however, that the rise in murder rates is the result of a rise in national wealth, is of course inadequate and misleading. Nonetheless during the period 2000 to 2008 the murder rate in T&T increased 366% (Townsend, 2009: 18) while, according to World Development Indicators (10 August 2016), GDP increased by 242% over the same eight-year period. Other crimes against the body, like domestic violence, kidnappings and rape, also saw unprecedented increases. According to Seepersad, 'from 2000 to 2010, the average annual murder rate in T&T was 25.1 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to an average of 20.9 for the Caribbean as a whole and 5.4 for the United States' (2016: 14). In 2009 it was 43 per 100,000 inhabitants.

In terms of the sex, ethnicity and age profile of murder victims in T&T between 2001 and 2013, young, black males from poor urban areas with long histories of underdevelopment and poor government planning made up by far the greatest number of victims,
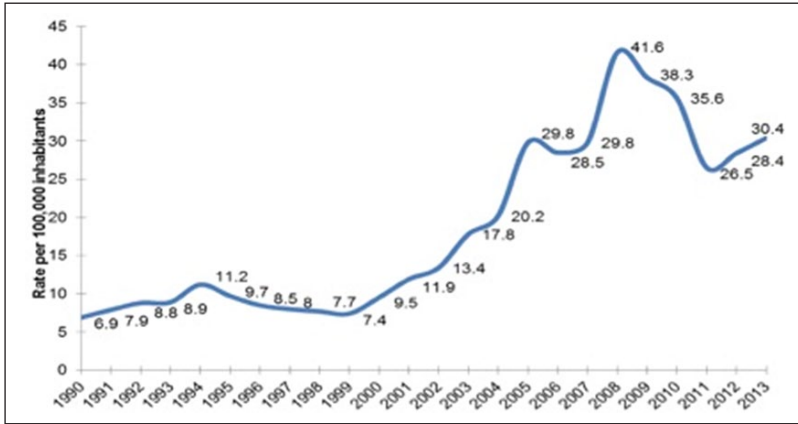
Figure 1. Murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago (1990–2013).
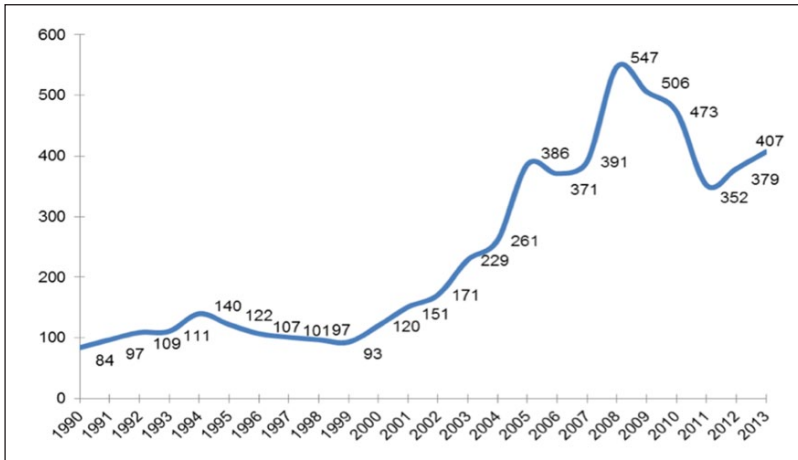Source: Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, cited in Seepersad (2016).

Figure 2. Number of murders in Trinidad and Tobago (2000–13).
Source: Seepersad (2016).

and it is predominantly these bodies that appear on newspaper front pages and the nightly 7 o'clock news, interspersed with adverts for Carnival loans and parties which use the light-skinned pretty mas body in their visuals.

In recent times the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's (GOTT) response to the increasing lawlessness has included declaring a State of Emergency and curfew in historically poor communities, putting the police and army together in joint patrols in those same communities, attempting (unsuccessfully) on numerous occasions to pass a bill giving the army police powers of arrest, buying new weapons and technology,
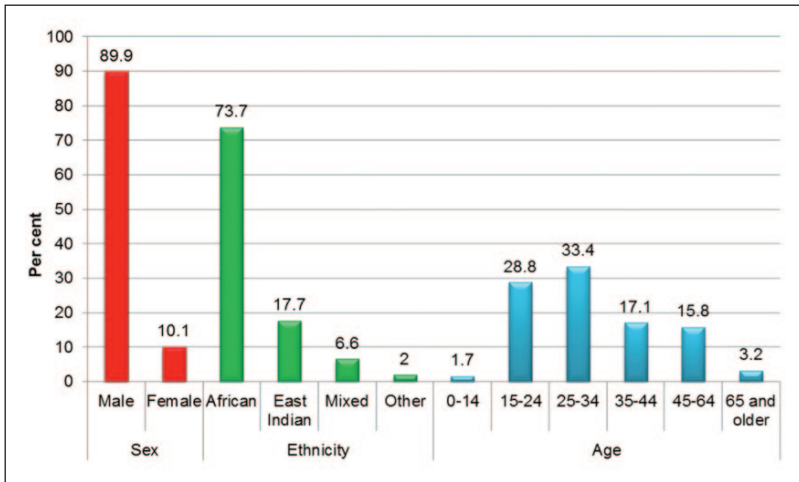
Figure 3. Sex, ethnicity and age of murder victims (2001–13).
Source: Seepersad (2016).

including the purchase of 20 armoured SUVs and 15 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), a 'new rapid response strategy' (*Trinidad Express*, 7 January 2014), a Citizen Security Programme, a dedicated sports programme, which has been subject to massive fraud, and a variety of preventive programmes aimed at stopping crime before it happens.

Another level of response by the GOTT has been verbal. For example, the state and its main supporters, the political, financial and repressive classes, have all declared war on crime and, as such, a war on some of their own citizens. Kamla Persad Bissessar, the previous prime minister, described unleashing 'the dogs of war … to fight what I see as a war, and this war is on crime and criminals' (*Trinidad Express*, 22 August 2013).

The Chamber of Commerce confirmed they 'strongly believe that the war on crime must be fought on all fronts, utilising legislation, enforcement, the prompt administration of justice, good example and the social net' (*Trinidad Express*, 16 August 2013). And a deputy police commissioner, Mervyn Richardson, let the public know 'this is a war and we will win. We are sure about this. It is just a matter of time' (*Trinidad Express*, 4 August 2013).

Yet in this weaponised solution there are no anthropological considerations. There is no consideration of the context of social problems, the background to the problem, or the historical evolution of the issues. Historical racism, structural poverty and cumulative local disadvantages are all ignored and often replaced with ungenerous and generic neoliberal rhetoric about a failure of morality, parenting or education. Murderers and often their poor black victims are simply 'bad people'.

In an ex-colony founded on the original sin of racial violence, that black bodies are still those suffering the greatest violence and murder suggests the coloniality of power, much like in the Carnival example, is once again salient. Those who suffer the greatest victimisation and who suffer the most in terms of insecurity, or rather are excluded from

security, are still poor black males. And the majority of murders take place in poor black areas like Morvant, Laventille and River Estate, which are geographically segregated and apart from where the middle and upper classes live (Seepersad 2016).

Dismissing the sociological imagination, the structural racism between nations, and over four centuries of Caribbean underdevelopment by nations in the Global North (Fanon, 1965; Rodney, 1974), the US Department of State (2014) is clear on where it lays the blame for the 'critical level' of crime it observes in T&T.

> The majority of violent criminal activity (i.e., homicides, kidnappings, assaults, sexual assaults, etc.) in Trinidad is gang/drug related or domestic in nature. A significant and growing portion of this violence is attributed to the influence of gangs, illegal narcotics, and firearms. Over 100 criminal gangs have been identified in Trinidad and Tobago, and these gangs, as well as other organizations, have been linked to crimes related to weapons smuggling, fraud, and other organized criminal activities.

Yet such definitions, while important, erase discussion of the 'positional difference' and the structural inequalities set up by slavery, colonialism, imperialism and globalisation. This approach obscures the constitution of nations and important cumulative issues of justice denied, such as exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young, 1990) that have oppressed and still oppress some nations, and hindered the progress of certain class sections more than others. It also carries the implicit assumption that structural inequalities should no longer be the main focus of government concern and instead gangs and their violence should be met with equal or greater state violence as the solution – a gross and dehumanising simplification that removes the context as well as obscuring other possible solutions from the equation.

Discussion: the everyday life of the pretty and grotesque in urban Trinidad

Recruiting the words of local elites about crime in the local society, the grotesque and murdered body of crime and violence in T&T becomes a justification for the rich to divide themselves from the poor using war-like terms and imagery. The pretty mas body is a symbol of an exclusive type of masquerade where only those who can afford it may take part. Taken together, the normalisation of these bodies can suggest a society increasingly defined by class inequality and warfare, rather than race and ethnicity, as has been more traditionally the case.

Can we say these bodies have a dialogical relationship to the nation, to citizenship, to issues of inclusion and exclusion? My personal thought is yes, and within what Ortner (2005) calls a 'matrix of subjectivity' these two once exceptional bodies now normalised, are two voices among many others in a process of overdetermination influencing how people see and imagine themselves, constructing meaning about processes of being included or excluded from the nation. As mentioned at the outset, in T&T, security and Carnival are central elements in the conversations local people have about being a Trinbagonian. The biggest problem with this conclusion, however, is that when I asked people in Trinidad how these two bodies intersecting and colliding in the same public,

geographical and verbal space – the social world and subjectivity of Trinidadian citizenship, nationhood and class – were connected to one another, I was met by quizzical denials.

Every person asked – from friends to government officials – denied any connection. Where I saw dialogical relations, they saw a separation between contrasting everyday images and symbolism; between jouissance and mutilation, celebration and fear, laughter and grief, and they maintained it. Should this surprise us? Isn't it cultural theory's role to expose the hidden lines between things?

Yes, one of the central tasks of Cultural Studies is to look out for the connections between things. As Arendt (1999: 17) reminds us: what is 'the correlation between a street scene, a speculation on the stock exchange, a poem, a thought with the hidden line that holds them together'? Well let's imagine strolling through downtown Port of Spain – the capital of Trinidad – at dawn on Carnival Monday morning 2016, when J'ouvert – a 4 a.m. Carnival celebration and opening more of the masses and often with no cost for participation – gives way and slips into the all-exclusive pretty mas – that is, Carnival based on your ability to pay. What is the hidden line holding together the glitter on the streets, the murderous newspaper headlines, the mud- and paint-covered J'ouvert bodies wearily heading home, the gunman lyrics drifting from cars, the salacious pretty mas bodies emerging to meet their bands, the service workers making their way to serve the pretty mas revellers, and the spectacle of a night's revelry turning fully to become daytime revelry? I think the line holding them together is historical depth (Benjamin 1999: 253–64). That each body, each 'phantasmagoric' element, each dialogical voice is a portrait of history and, what's more, that when we blast open these portraits we find the history of class oppression connecting the past to the present.

The historical depth and class oppression of the phantasmagoric experience and things of everyday life is also contained within the sexualisation and commodification of bodies, as it is contained within contemporary manifestations of violence. Nothing just comes into being. Everything has a genealogy. A context. History is the way the powerful justify their power and identify the idea of 'progress' – that we are forever moving toward more freedoms – as the rationale for supporting capitalism and their ideas about development. But if we view history through a colonial/postcolonial lens as a runaway train heading for disaster, a series of defeats suffered by the oppressed and subordinate (Benjamin 1999: 257–8), we begin to glimpse one way to connect the grotesque body with the pretty body; and this is a form of global class power, contextualised by local circumstances, which replaces local structures of inequality established during colonialism and releases modern forms of exclusion to continue racial and classist forms of stratification and segregation; a coloniality of power (Mignolo, 2000). In other words, both bodies tell us a story of class warfare by other means. Or, in the case of a postcolonial state like T&T – a recolonisation of the nation.

'Class power', according to Harvey (2005), ensures the surplus value any society generates, has been and continues to be appropriated by and centralised for the benefit of those groups who already have access to political, economic and social power. In the context of ex-colonies like T&T this observation is particularly salient as it often provides an insight into the modern development of social relations and group power locally. The end results of this system of class power or 'punishment of capital' (Linebaugh,

1992), whose roots extend into the past, are readily observable on the ground in Port of Spain in modern forms of socio-economic stratification, a closed class system, and the dispossession/exploitation of certain sectors of the local population through violence and class-based social inequalities. It is the coloniality of power made visible.

The consummation between the two everyday images of the body discussed here, bodies my informants say do not have any connection, could be described as a mechanism for the reproduction of the status quo – a society of exclusion and inclusion divided not simply by race and structures of slavery any more, but by economic class and the structures of a localised form of neoliberalism. Class as an analytical tool and the dominant form of stratification in modern T&T society returns to a country where scholarship is mired in previous postcolonial discourses of ethnicity and race. Increases in the number of dead bodies are a justification for the rich to divide themselves from the poor, while the pretty mas body is a symbol of the exclusion of Carnival's authors – the working class – from participation in it. Both bodies intersect with notions of citizenship because both bodies express a relationship between social classes.

As Bakhtin (1968) reminds us, in the modern canon – and I'm extrapolating this to read the modern social world of T&T – the lifelessness of the dead, is literally that, a dead-end. In the modern world the dead do not represent the life-giving womb of Bakhtin's grotesque realism and his notion of social rebirth. They do not represent a renewal of culture. Dead bodies have no place in the conscious nationalistic narrative because the rich desire distance from the poor. They see themselves differently. Yet this distance is a form of nationalistic self-contempt, because it leaves some behind. As such it must be made invisible. The social stratification produced with regard to access to security provision and the necessity of 'gated-community life' can be read as a distortion and means to disguise one social class's self-contempt for the inclusive nation.

Carnival on the other hand is still mostly cited much as Best and Nettleford once did, as a festival of nationhood, as the popular cultural refrain and GOTT tagline around Carnival, 'all of we is one' continues to express; notwithstanding that, once upon a time, it was Indo-Trinidadians who were, to a point, excluded from playing mas, and today there has been a shift from ethnicity to class exclusion. The pretty mas body, beautiful, gyrating, full of libidinal energy, screaming in its openness to be seen and interpellated as a symbol of national pride works in a reverse manner to the dead body (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984). It is a visible distraction from the middle- to upper-class takeover of the festival, for which we could substitute the nation more generally in terms of class-defined access to political power, employment, security and, more broadly, capital.

Bakhtin also noted how the human body could be a metaphor for the stones used to construct strong city walls. He suggested sometimes it is the bones of soldiers, sometimes the genital organs of women and at other times the valour of citizens who compose these walls (1968: 312–13). In Trinidad images of the body, both violent and sexual, may be described as composing walls to hide from different social classes the sight, and sites of the construction of class hierarchies, social stratification, methods of exclusion and the erosion of citizenship based on shared culture and nationhood. Each dead body, each pretty mas body appears disconnected from such processes – but if we look closer we see the scars of a class-based society written on their skin and subsequently the fortification

of a nation in the minds of rich and poor alike, based on the social inclusion of some and the social exclusion others.

Final thoughts: 'Who ent dead, badly wounded'

The title to this article is taken from the chorus of a popular soca song 'Talk Yuh Talk' by 3 Canal heard every year since 2005. As this piece has tried to demonstrate, in many ways if you are a poor, black male living in certain urban locations in T&T the reality of economic stratification and social exclusion is wounding – and for many fatal; while the experience of being poor as the metaphor of Carnival suggests is a reality of socio-cultural and economic dispossession. By this I mean structural violence and inequality is wounding to everyone who imagines living in an inclusive nation.

Since the late 1980s, global economic transformations have impacted levels of inequality locally and, I suggest, reinforced class relations in T&T. For some black males, whom I might describe as being members of the lowest income groups and as such socially excluded on many levels, this new and more brutal inequality as referenced by the murder rate has for some favoured involvement in many get rich schemes such as drug dealing, gang membership and other forms of crime. In many ways this behaviour and reality itself can be indirectly suggested as contributing to a scenario wherein securitisation has become a major trope within the society. This includes the high security for Carnival bands and parties, which some might say leads to higher participation costs and higher rates of exclusivity, which in turn increases the sense of alienation of low-income populations, a kind of non-virtuous circle. It also includes the rise of gated-community life and private security that stratifies and segregates the nation geographically.

My second assertion is that, in the middle-to-upper-class takeover and segregation of the festival through pretty mas, there is a desire for status display and to stand out among and to peers, as exemplified by expensive Carnival bands and costumes, but this should not be understood simply to be about a general social recognition. It is also a means to assert conformity and in-group belonging. Playing pretty mas (as opposed to traditional mas) means all wearing the same China-made costumes and socialising with the same class of people, drinking from the same in-group bars as opposed to going outside of the physical security lines and buying from street vendors and interacting with people excluded from pretty mas. Pretty mas in this way physically delimits the geographic and psychic space of the middle and upper classes to a safe part of the capital city and ensures the pretty mas band routes and eyes of its participants never reach the lower class parts of the city. Some might describe this as a socio-cultural manifestation of class warfare.

While these scenarios make sense, I think they are only part of the local story. Nonetheless they demonstrate some of the ways the global context and, specifically, neoliberalism has territorialised locally and reinforced forms of inequality that already existed on the ground. As was shown with the example of Carnival in terms of who gets to take part and who does the staffing, intersections of class, race and gender familiar to the 19th century echo into the 21st. It is a similar situation in the context of which bodies suffer the most in terms of murder and violence, highlighting the way class interacts with race, ethnicity and gender today, much as it did in colonial days but with contemporary distinctions. In T&T then we might say that colonial, racial tropes of hypersexual and hyperviolent

bodies have reasserted and reformed themselves in the modern socio-economic present and impact the way the nation itself is now both imagined and lived as segregated, whether the focus is residential geography, Carnival or deadly violence.

Funding

Notes

1. Carnival season lasts from band launches in May or June to Ash Wednesday in Feb or March
2. 'Playing mas' means taking part in Carnival and 'jumping up' (dancing) in a band

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