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# **Editor's Note**

t is with great pleasure that I announce the second volume of our journal. This volume contains both the results of our symposium and contributions to our call for papers. What follows is the first of two parts addressing the theme of 'connections, interconnections, and disconnections'

Among the contributions were articles about carnivals, festivals, rituals, and other celebrations, and how people feel connected, interconnected, disconnected, or reconnected within them. In terms of aesthetics and sensory experience, what connects us to celebratory and festive places and spaces? How might time, people, community, networks, cooperative spirit, food, dress, costumes, and so on, be connected? In what ways and why do we form connections?

What follows is a list of articles, the opening article articulates two guest lectures presented at the symposium, which was titled 'Seeing Crises and Seizing their Potential'. This highlights the views of an academic and of an artist, one considering the potential of museum festivals and the other critically analysing the politics of culture. In her ethnographic work, Aleida Bertran explores time-related connections and reconnections between festival communities; Adeola Dewis discusses how an appreciation of carnival reconnected her with her creative practice; Ana Arán Sánchez's review of author Gladiz Esperanza Rodríguez Ríos' book on the *Ralámuli* custom draws attention to the interconnections between deathcelebration-end process; and Rhonda Allen provides a review of her carnival tour of 2023, connecting us to carnivals in the UK, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Netherlands. In our interviews, we explore the work of a contemporary artist and a photographer, and the photo essays offer an engaging and intellectually stimulating visual narrative. In this publication, I have once again employed rich

photography to captivate the audience with our central theme of 'connections, interconnections, and disconnections' by seamlessly blending visuals with text, especially in the form of photography and interviews. We are excited to see how this volume will inspire connections for our audience.

Our in-house photographers based in Trinidad and Tobago have created a collection of images that have been warmly received in our previous volume. In this volume, our aim is to showcase the dynamic culture of the Caribbean through these eye-catching images. The photographers continue to illustrate the cultural essence of the twin islands, from mesmerizing moko jumbies and mas' camps to festive celebrations, attracting our readers with their unique storytelling through vivid photographs. These stories offer a fascinating window into the culture of Trinidad and Tobago, allowing readers to truly immerse themselves in its beauty.

I am thankful and grateful to all the contributors for their support and dedication, and for making this volume possible. Thanks go out to all our supporters, including our editors, who have invested their time and effort in peer-reviewing and proofreading articles. The development of Volume 2, the first part of our connections theme, has been an exciting journey. In the next volume, we look forward to this stimulating theme.

> Thank you, Dr R. L. de Matas Editor in Chief

# **Author Bios**

Aleida Bertran is a PhD candidate in Theory of Ana Arán Sánchez is a full-time teacher and researcher at a public university in the north of Mexico. Culture at the Latvian Academy of Culture (Riga, Latvia). She has a masters' degree in Psychopedagogy and is a She holds a BA in Translation and Interpreting Studies PhD candidate of Educational Sciences. at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and an MSc in Cultural Resource Management at Heriot-Watt University. Her academic research focuses on identity in Dr Adéolá Dewis originally from Trinidad and the field of international folklore festivals, exploring the cultural connections between Latvia and Catalonia. She belonging through the visual and performance aesthetics has lectured at the Latvian Academy of Culture and is a of Carnival/mas', masquerade and folk rituals. Her practice member of the LangCat research group affiliated with the Intercultural Spaces, Languages and Identities Research word and writing. Adéolá is also Founder of Laku Neg Group of Pompeu Fabra University.

Tobago, Adéolá explores expressions of identity and encompasses drawing, painting, performance art, spoken (Black Yard), an artist-run company that promotes the exchange of African diaspora and indigenous knowledge through conversations, articles and events that engage philosophy, heritage, arts and living culture.

Prof Jarula M. I. Wegner is a Hundred Talents Young Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Zhejiang University, China. He is Editorial Board member of the Festival Culture Research and Education network, Cofounder and Co-speaker of Memory Studies Association's Global Memories Working Group and Member of the Working Group for Critical Social Theory and Social Philosophy at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany. He holds degrees in Chinese (BA), German (MA) and English (MA and PhD) with a doctoral thesis on "Transcultural Memory Constellations in Caribbean Carnivals: Literature and Performance as Critique." He has been Visiting Scholar at Columbia University (USA), the University of Warwick (UK) and the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine (Trinidad and Tobago). He has published with international, peer-reviewed journals, such as, ARIEL, Caribbean Quarterly, Critical Arts, Journal of West Indian Literature, Memory Studies and Wasafiri.

Rhonda Allen is a former Director of the Sheffield Carnival involved in organising its first virtual carnival in 2020. She has judged costume competitions in Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the UK, and has been on the judging panel at Sheffield Theatres selecting plays to be performed for the theatre season. She is also in full costume for Luton carnival in 2022, and currently working on the Preston Carnival to develop their costume judging programme. Rhonda has many years of experience working in carnival in various capacities that has encouraged her to focus on carnival costume judging, its traditions, practices and contemporary perspectives. Her research focuses on carnival, in particular the aesthetics of costume design and performance and how it is judged both in Trinidad and Tobago and the UK. She is currently exploring costume making, costume design and performance, embodiment, traditions, heritage, the costumed body and autoethnography.

# Call for Papers: International Symposium on Festival Culture 2024

ur fifth annual event addresses the theme of 'sensing euphoric and dysphoric atmospheres' in festive, celebratory, and ritual cultures. Taking an embodied perspective, we focus on the role of corporeal perception in making sense of lived experience.

With regard to atmospheres, we focus on "the ways in which a multiplicity of bodies [are] part of, and entrenched in, a situation that encompasses it" (Riedel 2019:85). We aim to explore what existential phenomenology can reveal about carnivals, festivals, ceremonies, fetes, fairs, rituals, and other celebrations. Thus, exploring the euphoric and/or dysphoric atmospheres associated with these events and celebrations.

Our theme takes into account shared values, practices, customs, heritage, traditions, continuity, uniqueness, and differentiation within festive and celebratory culture. It is also important to consider the degree to which euphoria and dysphoria can be shared and learned, along with the camaraderie and familial aspects related to them.

Proposals may also address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Art, Craft, and Practice
- Carnivals (including Diasporic Carnivals)
- Celebration and Leisure
- Competition, Adjudication, and Legacy
- Costume and the Body
- Creative Industries
- Culture and Politics
- Dance and Performance
- Education
- Embodiment
- Events
- Food Culture
- Community Making (Re-making)
- Literature
- Medieval Culture
- Night Festivals
- Memory, Nostalgia, and Temporality
- Music and Sound
- Tradition and Heritage
- Religion
- Resistance, Resilience, and Activism
- Sporting Celebrations
- Tourism

Abstracts of up to 500 words (only abstracts/papers that have not been previously presented and published will be considered) and biographies of no more than 100 words (in Word .doc format) should be submitted by 20 March 2024.

# **KEY DATES**

- 500-word Abstract Proposal Submission: 18th February 2024
- Notification of Acceptance: 20th February 2024
- Completed Presentation (optional): 1st April 2024
- Symposium Date: TBA



# Announcements

# Call for Papers Bakhtin for the 21st Century

Guest Edited Issue by: Dr Ivan Stacy (Beijing Normal University) Deadline for submissions: See website

Foreword by Prof Sue Vice, author of Introducing Bakhtin. This edition was born out of last year's ISFC 2021 workshop with Dr Kim Johnson and Dr Jarula M.I. Wegner: A New Paradigm, Moving on from Bakhtin. Dr Stacy had the idea that there needs to be further discussion on Bakhtin in relation to festival culture, and will be curating strong and serious contributions to this special issue. We are happy to invite submissions to the call for papers.

Find out more at: festivalculture.co.uk/bakhtin

# Call for Proofreader/Copy Editor

As part of this role, you will need excellent English language skills, exceptional attention to detail, and time management skills. This role may also be of interest to a student, retiree, or independent scholar.

# Main Responsibilities:

- Working alongside the editor-in-chief Assist in copy editing articles using inter-, multi-, trans- and cross-disciplinary approaches
- Strong communication (oral and written) and interpersonal skills
- Exceptional English
- Assess the quality of submissions and offer appropriate feedback to authors when revisions need to be made or articles are rejected

Find out more at: festivalculture.co.uk/opportunity

# **Call for Book Reviews**

We invite book reviews (700 - 1,200 words) on work on the following topics, but not limited to: Carnivals (business, entrepreneurship, combined arts, performance), Caribbean Festivals, Celebrations, Community Festivals, Festival Cities, Festival/ Celebration, Night Life, Festivals and Fiestas in South America, Gatherings (crowds, fans, activities), Medieval Festivals, Celebrations and Events, Music Festivals, Religious Events, Ritual Culture, Pan and Panyards. We also invite reports (5,000 words), review essays (should focus on 3–5 books on a similar topic or theme), analysis of festival events, and interviews (between 800 and 1,200 words).

Find out more at: festivalculture.co.uk/call-for-reviews

# Call for Papers *Caribbean Culture*

# Deadline for submissions: Ongoing

We are committed to developing an understanding of how festive, ritual, celebratory, etc culture impacts aspects of Caribbean life, and vice versa.

Find out more at: festivalculture.co.uk/caribbean-culture

# Obituary Lutus Moses (1938–2023)



# In Memory of a Friend, Innovative Scholar, Entrepreneur, Mentor, and Teacher

FCRE pays tribute to Lutus Moses (1938–2023), a friend of the network who supported education and culture. He left an indelible mark on his community as a cultural figure, He believed that mathematics improved learning and educator, and entrepreneur. He was a disciplinarian and development across a wide range of areas. A large number of his students received part-scholarships to American unwavering in his commitment to inspire others through education and music. He loved his family unconditionally universities after taking his Standard Assessment Test (SAT) classes. Additionally, he taught mathematics at a and became a role model for upcoming generations. His passion for the community was demonstrated in the time, youth camp for many years. energy, and innovative ideas he contributed. As a younger man, he led a community choir and sang, and played guitar Part of his home was converted into a math school, at village and community festivals and events. resulting in the birth of the 'Math House'. He loved

In the Winward district of Tobago, he formed the Speyside Young Amateurs group, which pioneered folk arts. A school choir he formed also won the championship at the 1968 music festival. He was the musical director of the Best Village group at Pembroke Anglican Primary School, which placed fourth and sixth in the Prime Minister's Best Village competition between 1971 and 1974. At Tobago's music festivals in 1972 and 1974, he led the village choir and school choir to championships. Hundreds of students

passed their primary school leaving exams through the adult education classes he organised. He assembled a small band of musicians that performed at concerts and on the local radio station.

Part of his home was converted into a math school, resulting in the birth of the 'Math House'. He loved his profession and dedicated 60 years to teaching. He taught approximately 80 percent of Tobago's population, according to estimates. As a mentor, Lutus taught many young people the importance of education and pursuing their dreams. His family, friends, and community looked up to him as a role model and inspiration. There will be a void in his absence.

# 3RD ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON FESTIVAL CULTURE

ISFC June 2022: Report on conference proceedings

Image © Catherine Sforza Moko Somokow at the Starlift Panyard



# Seeing Crises and Seizing their Potential: Sarah Feinstein's and Rubadiri Victor's Contributions to the International Symposium of Festival Culture 2022 (ISFC)

he Third International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC) in 2022 continued the pursuit of fostering transnational, transcultural, and transdisciplinary dialogues. Individual sessions brought together academics, artists, and activists from different continents and backgrounds for a time of intense and in-depth conversations on festival cultures around the world. The spirit of the symposium was reinforced by Dr Sarah Feinstein from the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds and the multi-media artist, cultural, and political activist Rubadiri Victor. These lectures rounded off the event, with Feinstein discussing the cosmopolitan potential of museum festivals, and Victor examining the origins, elements, and potential of the crises pervading Trinidad Carnival. Despite their different respective locations of England and Trinidad and Tobago, their different backgrounds—one academic and the other artistic—, as well as the different foci, these two presentations productively connected with and enriched each other.

In her talk, Festival Fever: The Political Agency of Festival in Museums, Feinstein focussed on the tension inherent in festival cultures—both regulatory and liberatory—in relation to existing power dynamics within museums, considering these factors through different analytical lenses of cosmopolitanism. Based on wide-ranging academic research along with more than two decades work with museums around the Washington DC Mall (including the Smithsonian) and the feminist arts collective District of Ladies, Feinstein opened by presenting the question, can the festival be a space and place of resistance in the museum context, or is it deemed to be one of co-option and consumption? She explored this question in relation to museums and festivals in the late eighteenth century, Washington DC's Smithsonian Folklife Festival since 1967, and the Worker Festival Museum, highlighting in particular the tensions between regulation and liberation.

Feinstein analysed the festivals with a focus on the specific power dynamics shaping these from within and without. More specifically, she viewed festivals through the lens of power, which the philosopher Michel Foucault described as not only coercive but also negotiated, procedural, and producing forms of resistance (Rouse 1994: 109). The World's Fair expositions and festivals in this regard were not only inextricably linked to the foundation of national museums, but also to indoctrinating industrial and colonial power. From a historical perspective, these festivals were particularly shaped by industrialisation in the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, cultural exchange from the late 1930s to the 1980s, and nation branding since the 1980s (Wong 2022).

Feinstein went on to explain that The World's Fair collections and ideologies became models for national museums. A focus on power reveals that the museums' morals were both subtle and overt, born from the contradictory impulses of

### Prof Jarula MI Wegner

The School of International Studies Zhejiang University liberal democracy and domination. This is exemplified in the circumstance that the national museum collections are based on materials from these World's Fairs.

Considering the idea that forms of domination inspire their own forms of resistance, Feinstein asked whether the legacy of the World's Fairs would enable forms of agency, resisting the totalising pursuits of white supremacy. In the USA, World's Fairs also included a Women's Pavilion—which were used by suffragists to support their campaigns—and yet Feinstein suggests these pavilions also reproduced exclusionary practices based on class and race (Carby 1989: 4ff). The exclusion of African-Americans from the exposition's planning and organisation was met with further resistance, with the Haitian government therefore appointing the social reformer, abolitionist, and writer Frederick Douglass as co-commissioner and turning the Haitian Pavilion into a site for cultural activism (Asquith 2018: 538-539). Such strategies interrupted and subverted the ideology of white supremacy from within, at the very site of its unfolding.

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Feinstein's second example, was created specifically in response to cultural struggles as it sought to present cultures that have been marginalised and excluded from the programmes of national museums (N'Diaye, Cadaval and Kim 2016). Feinstein questioned whether this festival's structure was effective in its attempts, or whether it served as a new form of marginalisation and obfuscation. Did the museum festival really move beyond inclusion and egalitarian representation towards cultural and political recognition? Considering the influences of World's Fairs and counter-cultural movements, Feinstein argued that the Folklife Festival is a compelling example of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. In some respects, the festival turns to the local and grassroots elements by including cultural creativity as well as activism. It reproduces national ideologies even while doing so through a cosmopolitan lens.

Feinstein defined cosmopolitanism as the idea of global citizens entitled to equal respect and consideration. Within the concept of cultural cosmopolitanism, she identified three different forms: aesthetic, vernacular, and creole. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism is linked to optics, consumption, and co-option and, while it democratises representation, it fails to do so with power (Sassatelli 2011: 23ff). Vernacular cosmopolitanism, in contrast, considers the deviation of everyday experience as constitutive of globalisation (Bhabha 1996), but is not merely a deviation: it represents the agency of subaltern discourse. To move festivals towards effective structural changes, rather than simply representational ones, Feinstein argued that it is necessary to turn to the idea of creole cosmopolitanism decentres and disrupts imperial discourses of cultural authorities and pure identities, questioning dominant paradigms. In this way, Feinstein suggested, it becomes possible to analyse the different power dynamics permeating festival cultures, such as the World's Fair and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

The talk's title, "Festival Fever", echoed Jacques Derrida in order to highlight the agency of material archives which are, on the one hand, embedded in power structures, but on the other may also serve to disrupt through cultural signification (Derrida 1996: 28). The cultural materials of museums and festival culture in this sense are embedded in the remains of colonial structures and white supremacy, but also offer potential sources of ephemeral and temporary interruptions and resistance. In reference to this seemingly irresolvable tension, Feinstein asked again, how can the festival be a space and place of

resistance in the museum context? While she presented these considerations of both highly abstract theoretical considerations and local, practical experiences and concerns as open questions, her detailed analysis outlined a framework and tools needed to negotiate such tensions of ongoing and heterogeneous power dynamics pervading museum and festival cultures.

These tensions, frictions, and continuous challenges were also central to the second contribution by Rubadiri Victor, on The Crisis, Crossroads, and Contemporary Innovation in the Trinidad Carnival. Victor is a multi-media artist from Trinidad and Tobago, whose work spans more than twenty years in painting, theatre, music, film, photography, carnival arts and more. Building on his extensive cultural activism as founder of the *Artists' Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago*—as well as his role as storyteller of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival—he interwove the historical with the mythical, and the secular with the sacred, by focussing on "the state of the mas" within the onslaught of globalising capitalism, demographic transformation, and ongoing struggles to inherit the past. Victor's perspective as an artist, cultural activist, and policy advocate offered a perspective that not only supplemented Feinstein's historical-theoretical investigation, but also engaged her questions by presenting material that may constitute fertile soil for future answers.

Victor began by noting that Trinidad and Tobago Carnival substantially surpasses the country's national borders. Since the twentieth century, it has inspired the creation of more than three-hundred carnivals around the globe, including some of the largest ones in the Western world: the Notting Hill Carnival in England and the Labour Day Carnival in Brooklyn, USA (see Nunley 1988). These carnivals, he emphasised, were not created by state functionaries or business investors, but through the tireless effort of Trinidadian and, more broadly, Caribbean people. Considering the transnational dissemination, popular support, and continuing creativity, he asked, what makes the festival this contagious? Victor suggested that the success builds on the unique meeting and mixing of "the festival tribes of the races of the world" in Trinidad and Tobago—which includes the Congo, Igbo and Yoruba from West Africa, Bengal and Behar from India, the Kalinago and Warao Indigenous societies—who turned today's Trinidad into a festival site more than seven thousand years ago. Even the French arrived, he said, in a moment and state of extreme debauchery. Rebelling against the colonial forces, these societies crossed the imposed boundaries to congregate, celebrate, and create a new Trinbagonian identity.

Victor criticised the ways in which colonial and postcolonial elites had impacted Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. In the festival, he believed to find two currents: the first being the Mardi Gras that derives from European tradition as a pagan, exclusive event intended for exhibition, and the second being Canboulay – a multi-racial tradition, both secular and spiritual, driven by African music such as calypso, samba, and salsa among others. Victor suggested that, since the Canboulay Riots in the 1880s, the Mardi Gras current had been "fed," while the Canboulay tradition had been "starved," evident from the carnival's subsequent history. The 1930s to 1950s are often considered the Golden Age of Trinidad's intellectual and cultural scene, and are marked in history by the creation of tents, large bands, and calypso's international successes (Green and Scher 2007: 5). Yet he believes that these important resources have been ignored by the independence generation and especially the political elite, which by the 1970s led to "the collapse of scale and the marginalisation of the roots."

Victor identified the continuous process of migration as another important factor affecting Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. The artisan class residing largely in Port of Spain's Belmont was a driving creative force in the national carnival and was, in terms of wealth, second only to the ruling elite. The migration of a large number of skilled artisans subsequently drained the creative sector in Trinidad, while it strengthened the hundreds of Trinidad-styled carnivals abroad (Green and Scher 2007: 5). He noted that the political elite regulating the national carnival and the representatives judging its competitions were less trained in appreciating and appraising the artists' creativity, than to impose the aesthetic, cultural, and political norms deriving from the former colonial society. This, he suggested, could be seen in the frequent divergence between the carnival committee judgements' and the People's Choice Award, before the latter was discontinued due to this divergence.

These historical factors, Victor argued, had thrown the festival into a substantial crisis. He opposed the idea that the support for Trinidad and Tobago Carnival weakened the rest of the country's cultural sector, and instead suggested that carnival itself received hardly any support due to a lack of funding from the state, private, and financial sectors. In consequence, most of the bands had disappeared or become indebted, while a small number of very large bands catering to elites received substantial funding from the financial sector and business sponsors. Traditional masquerade furthermore saw less and less participation, a disappearance of skills, and a forgetting of characters. He argued that even in Trinidad-styled carnivals around the world, the Trinidadian diaspora was losing influence and control due to the decreasing creative and administrative competence "at the centre" in Trinidad and Tobago.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival was in a state of crisis, yet since 2014, Victor observed a collective effort to innovate Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. "The word was on the streets," he said, "that we are on the brink of death." This inspired numerous measures, such as searching for elder practitioners to share their experiences, documenting and recording carnival practitioners and practices, and inspiring young people to revive traditional masquerade forms. Such interventions include Glen de Souza—also known as Dragon—who helped revive the Moko Jumbie tradition, Ashraph Richard Ramsaran who founded Cat in Bag Productions to combine traditional with African masquerade practices and comment critically on contemporary society, and Amanda T McIntyre, who brought the baby doll tradition to international attention (see Funk 2018; Trinidad Guardian 2014; Marshall 2021: 10ff). New sites were created, such as Robert Young's Independent Mas Speaks events at Granderson Lab, Rondell Benjamin's work in stick fighting and 3 Canal's Big Black Box, offering an important creative centre in the heart of Port of Spain.

In addition to these, Victor himself has, among other things, recorded traditional masquerade biographies, curated carnival exhibitions, and rescued historical sites from destruction. These processes have been furthered intellectually and practically by visionary theatre and performance experts such as Rawle Gibbons, Tony Hall, and Errol Hill (Regis 2017; Hall 2013; Hill 1974). Most of these people reviving the art forms are university-educated middle-class intellectuals as well as artists, and all these processes, Victor summarised, are at "the heart of resurrection." He thus described a seemingly paradoxical potential of innovation in traditional masquerade forms, emphasising that Trinidad and Tobago Carnival's historical location is at a crossroads. While the

practitioners, practices, and ideas seem to be disappearing, the resistance is being led by middle-class intellectuals and artists, with Victor warning that "they need to connect with the masses and they need enablers. And the masses, those working class, black, and brown people, who built these festivals, need access."

In the overall picture, he considered globalising forces not necessarily as detrimental, but as impacting carnival, just as carnival is impacting the world. These dynamics may in fact be useful, because they may offer opportunities to "export these resources back into the country to emancipate the Canboulay energies that are on the ground." He suggested that intellectuals and artists need to work both for and with the lower classes in order to resist the forms of control, regulation, and capitalisation imposed by bureaucracies and functionaries.

Although they described festivals in different regions, cultures, and with different goals, Sarah Feinstein and Rubadiri Victor both identified fundamental power dynamics that seek to control and commodify the events, while activists attempt to return agency to marginalised and disenfranchised communities. Both talks eloquently, elaborately, and inspiringly described ways of seeing crises in festival cultures and seizing their potential for intervention, reinforcing the symposium's goal of bringing together artists, activists, and academics to determine, discuss, and disseminate such possibilities.

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# PHOTO ESSAY **SNAPSHOTS OF** TRINIDAD CULTURE

# By Shaun Rambaran, in-house photographer

FEATURING

### Kaisokah Labour Day Walk San Fernando 19 June 2023

Although the well-known Labour Day walk organised by the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) from its San Fernando to Fyzabad offices had gone on pause during the Pandemic—and as such was not officially organised for 2023 several Moko Jumbies from Junior Bisnath's Kaisokah School of Arts still embark on the course. Instagram.com/juniorbisnath

### Point Fortin Borough Day 6 May 2023

A range of Trinidadian Traditional Mas' characters danced through the streets on Point Fortin Borough Day 2023.

# Traditional Mas' Contest

8 February 2023 Amphitheatre, Western Main Road, Saint James.

A deep desire to communicate forward Trinbagonian history and culture has become the prime motivator of photographer Shaun Rambaran, moving him away from a fifteen-year career in commercial work toward his passion topics of Trinbago Mas' and Carnival, stickwalking (stilt-walking), Moko Jumbie, Trinbagonian streetlife and architecture. Among his favourite photography memories are photographing Moko Somõkõw's 2019 queen, 'Mariella, Shadow of Consciousness' during her first on-stage appearance at the 2019 Carnival Queen Preliminaries, meeting-and later interviewing-the legendary Moko Jumbie, Dexter Stewart, and interviewing Andrew 'Moose' Alexander, Masman and Maker for Peter Minshall, Keylemanjahro, and his own Watusi Jumbies. In 2019, one of Shaun's photographs 'Jab Madonna', which featured Moko Jumbie, Shynel Brizan breastfeeding her son, went viral across multiple social media platforms. In 2022, Shaun was among several other artists featured in Arnim's Art Galleria's Carnival exhibition, 'Band Together' as well as The Rotunda Gallery's April exhibition, 'Universe'.

# instagram.com/method\_moda

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Rambaran Shaun, 'Snapshots of Carnival', *Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis*, 2.1, (2023), 18-45









































































































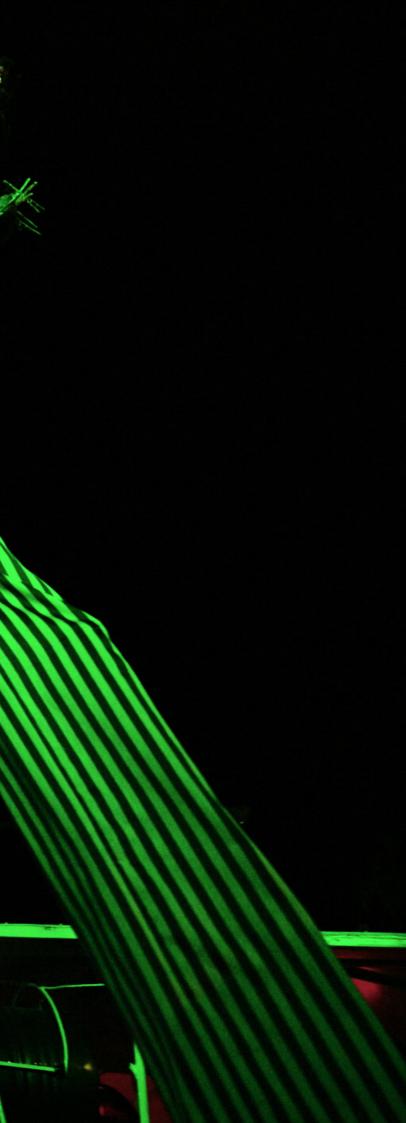


# PEOPLE CONNECTIONS PLACES INTERCONNECTIONS BELIEFS DISCONNECTIONS

Responses to the call for papers, following the 3rd Annual International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC)

© Catherine Sforza Moko Somokow at the Starlift Panyard

Image



# Diaspora Mas': Dancing Outside Opens the Road

**Dr Adéọlá Dewis** Artist & Researcher UK



### Abstract

n this paper I discuss mas' (Carnival) and some of the ways in which an appreciation of mas' was reborn in my practice, with reference to the concept of migration and how this facilitated a metaphorical move, closer to home. Here, I speak from a personal narrative perspective as a woman diaspora artist. This essay does not intend to speak on behalf of others, or to generalise others' experiences of migration – I understand and acknowledge that these experiences are specific to me, located within my own cultural and political context, but it is my hope that there are moments within this, that resonate with others. Although what follows is not overtly gender-based, I acknowledge the inevitable intersection of my experiences with the politics of my presence.

I see mas' forms emerging from circumstances and systems that insist that your presence, behaviour, culture, traditions, rituals, ways of being and doing are inherently, counter to a dominant. This situation of being "counter" derives from dislocation: being located, re-located, transplanted outside of home space – outside of norm, under the diameter. Within the dynamic of the situation of dislocation, there is the urgent need to be free and to be able to define for ourselves, what being free means to us. In my experience, this has meant the need to find spaces, moments, ways to be – the way you feel to be and to do, what you feel to do. That realisation allows us to dream, to see alternatives, to dance with *Esu* and claim agency to manifest, even if temporarily, our freedom. As a result, we inevitably utilise what we have—our bodies, our voice, our bits-and-pieces—in order to make a freedom, collectively and individually, expressing that which we

### Artwork Esu Series by Dr Adéolá Dewis Acrylic on photographic print paper artcollection.culture.gov.uk

### Original photos © Kyriacos Asprou

Keywords Art Carnival Mas Masquerade Diaspora Migration Visibility dream. This being free permits visibility of selves somewhat suppressed. Mas', as defined by Lloyd Best, is to be what you have to be, and to do what you have to do. My research acknowledges that this performance activity is outside of the everyday (involving masking, exaggeration, layering, re-presentation), but is still connected to it. The performance, costume or play, facilitates ways of engaging socio-political dynamics. Personally, my dislocation comes from moving from Trinidad and Tobago to Wales. That situation involved the natural navigation of finding my footing, the bruising, the confronting, that come from operating outside of home space. Those experiences permit the growth of different selfrealisations – a journey back to yourself or back to a self through which you can operate more fully. The realisation that we come with the tools that we need in turn, grows visions which was, in my case, a vision to make an art that encouraged me to reconnect with the mas' that I missed.

### Migration

It was not my ultimate intention to be living away from home for the last 20 years. Two decades ago, I was newly wed and intending to pursue my MA in Fine Arts at University of the Arts in London, but instead I was heading to Wales, where my then-husband had his roots. At that time, I knew little of Welsh history or of the Welsh language. I knew Wales was different to my island home, but I wasn't daunted by that notion of difference. In Trinidad, difference was prosaic and openly acknowledged and spoken about. Our people are made up of many different ethnicities - those of African and Indian descent are the majority, but there are also Indigenous First People, and those of Caucasian, Chinese, Syrian and Lebanese heritages, mixtures of these, and more. My memory of primary school playground conversations included being repeatedly asked the question, "what are you mixed with?" There was an almost obsessive knowing assumption that someone presenting as of obvious African descent was, in the mele of our island history, carrying mixed ancestry. What emerged from this open acknowledgement of difference was not only a genuine tolerance<sup>1</sup> for others—we can work, live, play and make families together—but also a feeling of belonging to this space we had collectively made.

What the island seemed to have balanced well was the celebration of national identity and the nations that contributed to this. Within this concept, there was respect and pride in Emancipation Day, Divali, Indian Arrival Day, Eid, Hosay, Spiritual-Baptist Day, Double 10 Day and so on. I have deliberately simplified this relationship as naturally there are multiple other dynamics at play in people relations, attraction and access to opportunities, including the ways in which we have the default capacity to revel chindeep in colonial legacies of colourism and shadeism, and so on. Politically, we have often witnessed the adoption of colonial tactics that amplify difference as a way of dividing and creating perceptions of the "other" as a threat, in order to win votes. Yet, within those nuanced relationships, there is a rootedness of place and belonging that permits expressions, vocality and gestures that speak from, and indeed prioritises, the popular over the established, systemic infrastructure. These physical, <sup>1</sup> I have often found this word problematic as it assumes power of one who tolerates over the other who is being tolerated. I use it here in its democratic definition – as a virtue of showing willingness to be within and around different behaviour, opinions, practices and people. creative and vocal articulations acknowledge that we all have a say. The Carnival holds space for that plurality and can be seen as the epitome of those expressions of belonging.

Wales occupies a precarious position as both colonised (by the English) and coloniser (as part of the British Empire). Because of my interest in Carnivals, I was introduced to an area of Cardiff known as Butetown, originally known as Tiger Bay and The Docks before its redevelopment by Cardiff Council. Butetown was known to have a popular Carnival but, at the time of my arrival, it was on hiatus. From as early as the 1800s, this dockland community was said to have been comprised of people from all over the world, where every ethnicity was represented and, as the story goes, they all got along. During the Windrush era—the period between 1948 to 1971, when people from British colonies were invited to Britain to help re-build the 'mother country' after World War 2—Butetown's reputation preceded it, and many Caribbean people saw it as a welcoming destination.

With gentrification and the invention of Cardiff Bay, the Butetown demographic is in transition. Although I felt connected to a version of the mixed heritage of Butetown's identity, reminiscent of a microcosm of my island, the Butetown people and I have inevitably had different processes of becoming. Our identities, perceptions of self and the world, although similar, were forged in direct relation to the socio-political contexts that surrounded us. An example of this distinction is evident in an interview conducted with a Butetown resident on her experience of the Caribbean Windrush generation. A child at the time, she remembers her parents and neighbours scoffing at the ambition these Caribbean people had to move out of the community that had embraced them when they first arrived, and to buy their own homes. There is, of course, ambition in Butetown and, more accurately, we understand that those who identify as Butetown people are not homogenous, as is the same with any group of people. One of the distinctions evident to me at that time—which was not particularly based on my Caribbean-ness<sup>2</sup> versus their Welshness-was the ability to speak out. Whereas I may have been vocal at home, in a land outside of my own, I was more inclined to recognise adverse treatment, to log it (perhaps vent with family) and quietly continue. The Black and Brown Welsh people who surrounded me had grown a fierceness and confidence in vocality that ensured that any adverse situation or treatment was immediately called out. This was perhaps not only borne from their circumstances of becoming, but also their rootedness in belonging.

My migration to Wales intersected with being a wife and then eventually becoming a mother. This means that when recalling my experiences of moving from a 'home' space to a new space, I may also be inclined to include dynamics that are more a consequence of the cross-over of these experiences than simply just migration. I felt as if my quiet ease of assimilation may have mitigated some of the harsh reactions to my otherness, but through that ease I may have also facilitated a diminishing of my *Trinidadian-ness, Caribbean-ness, Adéolá-ness.* Hall said that the beginnings of Caribbean people determines a kind of destiny to migrate,

<sup>2</sup> It is well known that Caribbean people have made colossal impacts on spaces that they move to, including people like Claudia Jones, Stokely Carmichael and Altheia Jones-Lecointe. but while fulfilling this destiny I ended up making myself smaller and quieter. I had encounters with galleries that said my paintings were too colourful. During the MA at a Welsh institution, my otherness was heightened. It was my presence that ignited the racial politics of my practice. It was my practice that facilitated my need to recognise self-suppressed aspects of presence.

# Moving Closer to Home

My parents had recommended that I do my first degree at home, rather than abroad. The thinking behind this was concerned with the opportunity to know myself and my culture deeper, with the critical lens of an emerging academic before venturing into the jaws of the outside world that have gobbled up those Caribbean people, not fully rooted. In my view, those people were predominantly epitomised by ones who visited the United States for the August holiday and returned to the island with a flawless American accent. Having completed my first degree in Trinidad, my MA ought not to have been the ground-shaker that it was. Again, the intersection of the other aspects of becoming wife and mother also played their part.

I entered this phase of my learning with questions around exploring ways of combining my movement practice and my fine art practice. My creative experiments with performance art led to critique around hypersexualisation and the politics of the Black female body. This critique was also present, in less-eloquent phrasing, from a local Cardiff Carnival group, by other carnival performers. Interestingly, those performers debasing my spontaneous performance were involved in a Trini-style Carnival tradition that was super-imposed onto the Welsh, Cardiff landscape – a tradition that was very personal to my Carnival experience in Trinidad. Their derogatory words heightened the question around what my body was allowed and not allowed to do – based on a politic that had little to do with Adéolá and everything to do with my perceived *otherness*.

I was once asked, "do you see yourself?" At the time I remember thinking that I did not see myself. The seeing implied a consciousness that had not yet reached maturity - one that echoed Hall's uncanny experiencing of oneself as both object and subject, of encountering self from the outside as another or an other and DuBois' earlier notion of double consciousness, and seeing self through the lens of a White society. The type of self-consciousness that necessitated itself through that comment, as a requirement of being within this space, perpetuated a level of insecurity. I allowed the insecurity that was already heightened by concepts of European superiority within the art world I encountered here, to lead to the whiting out of my canvases. The intension was to restart, to find my voice, to remove pre-conceptions of what I thought I knew, to dissolve who I thought I was and to begin again from that silence. Within the creative dark silence of this self-made cocoon, I was faced with the realisation of my situation of dislocation. The emerging questions pointed me back to core, to gut, to instinct, to joy: what do I know best? What is mine? How do I speak? In this darkness, I recalled my childhood of drawing and drawing and drawing the female

figure. On my whited-out canvases I drew a figure and then decided to become this perfect figure, by transforming her into a costume. I utilised stockings, canvas, an old vest, and called her cAnfAs. After exploring performance art interventions as cAnfAS at university social gatherings, I took her to Trinidad during the Carnival season. In cAnfAs on a Carnival Tuesday afternoon, two elders declared—amid dancing, costumed bodies that my art was mas'. These gentlemen gave me permission to be face-toface with my own performance art, my Jouvay, my mas', an experience that was rooted in my island. Inevitably, the offshoots of this experience were rooted in my body. Body memory, recollection and ritualising nostalgia all played crucial roles in the practice that emerged.

# Mas'

Carnival is the ideal integrated art form, seamlessly combining visual arts, performance, movement and music. My MA question concerned with finding ways of combining my art and movement work, found a comfortable fit within a carnival template. More importantly, the insecurity around exploring my practice within—what was presented as a British or European world of cutting-edge performance art, after being told that the Caribbean was ten-years behind in artistic innovations—began to dissolve. My focus shifted from facing North, to facing South. My question evolved to consider what this notion of mas' was. In that shift, I was not only re-orienting myself towards the familiar, I was also beginning to engage an agency that trusted processes involving body memory, embodiment, recollection and transformation. I knew this thing, and I knew it because it was part of me. This also implied that the mas' was also part of all those who were invested in it.

When I refer to mas', I am considering the popular, the artistic, linguistic and the innovative new re-imaginings of carnival forms and expressions. That perspective embraces a plurality of knowing and being and feeling – a plurality that can often manifest as contentious, but that exhibits precisely the dynamic that carnivals embody best, which is that of embracing all that is outside of the mundane, day-to-day. The other, the trans, the loud, the multiple, the spiritual, the free. For me, Jouvay—which is the pre-dawn Monday morning ritual that heralds the two-days of Carnival—was the epitome of the Carnival season. It embodies the liminal, the transitional, transformation, the darkness of creation, life and death, birth, becoming, healing and community. The opening lines in my presentation for 2017 Carnival: Conference at Leeds Beckett University pays homage to this Jouvay:

The pitch-black road – made from the black tar that erupts in the belly of the island. Black because it is and even blacker now as the sun slumbers, waiting to be invoked. Didn't the Robber say that on the day he was born the sun refused to shine? Well, on this black day, sleep will have to wait as expectant bodies gather. We know the drill. We've been doing this ritual since 1834. As mas' experiences are varied, it was crucial that my research considered the impressions of others in the field to gain a more intimate understanding. This research question of mas' followed me to my PhD and continued to inform my practice. The opportunity to be a PhD candidate at Cardiff University's school of Critical and Cultural Theory presented the framework within which mas' questions could be further explored. It was within that space that conceptualisations and contextualisation around what mas' was for me began to take shape. Here, I considered the intrinsic, elemental makeup of a concept of mas' as well as the ways in which mas' aesthetics could be implemented into art-making or art presentation. These lines of inquiry were also meant to resonate with people who may have been experiencing forms of displacement or social anxiety.

# Mas' reborn – Speaking out

What then does mas' begin to look like and sound like and feel like when it is severed from its socio-political and cultural context? What are the bare bones of this ritual and can we—like the *La Loba* archetype of Pinkola Estés' writing—gather, re-assemble and bring back a kind of life to these precious embodied 'rememberings', allowing our bodies to once again re-awaken the linear and horizontal lines of communication with our ties to self-empowerment? Can we mark time with these ritual objects and gestures, stripped bare of beads and feathers and scrubbed of glitter, paint and mud and encrusted instead with the stones, earth and coal of the damp Welsh landscape? Can the re-housing of our precious bits and pieces retain the primal power of their original context?

This mas' work exploration began with a collaborative project, Mama dat is mas, which explored masking, ritual and representation. In this group performance experiment, we intended to invoke collective memories of carnival and of home, making a temporary space to allow our bodies to ritually inhabit those memories<sup>3</sup>. The mas' experimentation continued into the following project Mama Mas: Conversations for Transformation<sup>4</sup>, which looked at experiences of motherhood. Here, the question was around the processes involved in inviting other people (in this case, mothers) to explore a mas' experience of empowerment, which was traditionally only available to carnival revellers, by engaging processes of telling, making, transforming and revealing/public presentation. For the public presentation, the final masking/re-presentation/transformation was photographed and displayed on billboards. The following project, *Play Yuhself*<sup>5</sup>, was a performance experiment that explored processes of accessing 'other' aspects of self. These processes included repetition, exhaustion, community and anonymity. The template here was a return to Jouvay, involving a pre-dawn dance ritual giving our bodies permission to move however they wanted to move. The musicians too had the task of unscripted, spontaneous organic drumming. Route to Roots<sup>6</sup> took the form of an artist residency, exploring carnival arts as a way of facilitating African diaspora knowledge exchange. This project involved a live performance that looked both to the past and to the future, through re-imagining a performance ritual that grappled with exploring traditional Egungun <sup>3</sup> http://mamadatsmas.blogspot. com

<sup>4</sup> http://masmama.blogspot.com

<sup>5</sup> http://playyuhselfexp.blogspot. com

<sup>6</sup> http://routetoroots2017. blogspot.com masquerade aesthetics, and the diaspora manifestations of African spirituality within a Carnival processional template. The transformational richness of this residency experience laid for me, in the conversations between the African and African diaspora artists. In many ways, this Route to Roots project was the spark that ignited the vision for Laku Neg - a burgeoning artist-run company invested in African Diaspora knowledge exchange. My practice involves writing, painting, drawing, performance and spoken word and, through each of these forms, my work continues to face homeward, stretching arms long and wide to connect and explore aspects of home outside of home-space. These art experiences do not replace the nourishment necessitated by a visit back to Trinidad - my investment in mas' simply keeps the connected arteries, unclogged.

I believe that evolution and change are constant. In mas' aesthetic works like the ones I explored, I re-imagined temporary spaces where transformation was necessary, where subversion was possible, where plural voices and opinions were heard, where subdued selves could dance without criticism and where we played and danced for ourselves. Outside, or perhaps on the side of art practice, I recall dancing in a Carnival parade with my first born. He might have been seven or eight years old. We had gotten to a point in the parade where he was feeling a bit tired. As we walked past spectators, an enthusiastic elderly woman, smiling and clapping her hands, said to him, "dance, dance, dance". I looked him squarely in the face and said, "you dance when you want to dance". "Your dance is for no one else but yourself". That spectators partake through observation is fine. For our Black and Brown bodies in this parade, the notions of spectacle and entertainment were too politically-loaded for me to allow his response to the elder's comments to result in an animated dancing boy with bowed head.

I think there is power in reclaiming mas', folk and traditional, ancestral performance aesthetics within the everyday, in allowing aspects to feed approaches to research interactions. Interpretations of mas' allow for ways of understanding our so-called othered bodies in spaces and places - understanding our belonging to this planet, beyond borders. Through mas' we claim imagination and agency to speak, to shout, to sing from a place of rootedness.

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# Festival Re-connections from the New Normality: The Baltica-Web Forum 2021

### Abstract

n Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Singing Revolution (1987-1991) marked a turning point in the restoration of national independence. This movement of non-violent resistance successfully engaged civil society in mass performative events and connected the three Baltic countries as a geopolitical unit, as embodied by the Baltic Way (1989). The Singing Revolution provided a new form of social capital, birthing a network of purveyors of folklore and cultural activists. Folk festivals became loudspeakers of the Singing Revolution, identifying the Baltic people as singing nations (Muktupāvela and Laķe 2020) through events such as the Song and Dance Celebration (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Tallinn Old Town Days (Estonia), Skamba Skamba Kankliai (Lithuania) and, this article's object of study, the International Folklore Festival Baltica (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

Inaugurated in 1987, the International Folklore Festival Baltica was born under the flagships of authenticity, kinship and Baltic unity. This festival was an initiative of international delegates attending the XVI World Congress of the International Council of Organisations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF), held in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1985 (Ojalo and Ojalo 2016). The festival became the "cornerstone" of national liberation (Muktupāvels 2011:89). The Baltica festival community then integrated members of the Baltic folklore movement – an informal cultural movement composed of folklorists, ethnomusicologists and music enthusiasts, who engaged in the experimental re-invention of Baltic instruments and traditions throughout the 1970s and '80s (Muktupāvels 2011). Although the activity of the Baltic folklore movement received various labels, this contribution will refer to the phenomenon as "Baltic neo-folklore" (Klotiņš 2002).

While the beginnings of the International Folklore Festival Baltica phenomenon have been widely researched by former members of the Baltic folklore movement (Boiko 2001; Kapper 2016; Klotiņš 2002; Kuutma 1998; Muktupāvels 2011; Rüütel 2004) and Baltic studies scholars (Šmidchens 2014), there is no holistic picture of the narrative, temporal and spatial transformations undergone by the Baltica festival. From a broader perspective, festival scholarship has tended to overlook these two dimensions, especially temporality (Getz 2010; Frost 2016). This paper addresses the unusual and unexpected metamorphosis of the Baltica festival during the second phase of the coronavirus pandemic. Under the name of new normality, this phase unfolded in the spring of 2021, gradually re-opening social and cultural life through social distancing and covid-safe measures, which led to the development of "new conventions, Aleida Bertran Latvian Academy of Culture Riga, Latvia

### Keywords

Social capital Cultural encyclopaedia Festival narratives Festival community Singing Revolution Coronavirus pandemic

rituals, images and narratives" (Corpuz 2021:e344). Within this context, the Baltica festival organisation designed the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 – an intimate online project of Baltic neo-folklore broadcast on YouTube from three different cultural centres, conducted exclusively in Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian. This contribution analyses the re-invention of the festival following interpretive ethnographic methods, grounded in participant observation and archival research on the festival's official programmes. This is in addition to 33 digitised newspaper articles covering the Baltica phenomenon (available at the Periodika repository of the National Library of Latvia), paying special attention to newspapers' qualitative interviews that were conducted with the festival community actors. This paper explores the impact of migrating the festival online, by comparing former festival narratives presented in official festival programmes and media, with visual participant observation on the Baltica-Web Forum 2021. This contribution argues that digital space created a new form of social capital that paradoxically connected the online festival to its beginnings, suggesting that the International Folklore Festival Baltica operates as a multinarrative space that can be revisited and instrumentalised in the present, as encapsulated by Umberto Eco's well-known concept of "cultural encyclopaedia" (1984). Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to enhance the understanding of the ways in which connections and reconnections of a festival community can be analysed, especially through the analysis of temporality, using ethnography as the main methodology.

# Connection as Social Capital: The International Folklore Festival Baltica

Festivals can be sites of identity-building, community bonding, and placemaking. As multifaceted socio-cultural phenomena, the impact of festivals on communities is significant because of their transformative potential and capability to enact alternative lifeworlds. These functions can be encapsulated within the notion of social capital (Quinn and Wilks 2013), a concept coined by Bourdieu (1986) and re-interpreted by scholars such as Fukuyama, who defines it as "the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them" (1997:378). Since festivals are constituted and celebrated by many actors-namely curators, artists, spectators, and sponsorsthey have become sites for weaving powerful networks. Nevertheless, owing to their unique nature and goals, international folk festivals have produced a distinct form of social capital. Their international label and the socio-cultural and political context from which they emerged render them prone to developing transnational solidarity networks. It can be argued that international folk festivals were a response to the social protests of the 1960s and the 1970s against capitalism, white supremacism, war, totalitarianism, and discrimination based on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. These festivals then became the "cultural apparatus" of the so-called second wave of the folk revival in the United States and Europe, seeking to provide spiritual solace and promote community ties (Mitchell 2007:x). Their counter-hegemonic spirit—sustained by universal values, a sense of imagined kinship, and harmony bound in a political agenda-supported their main goal to give a voice to the social groups exploited by the status quo, or those existing at the margins. In doing

so, international folk festivals fostered an environment of socio-cultural exchange and interest in other regions' cultural and political agendas. Illustrative of this, the vision and mission of the International Folklore Festival Baltica aimed to counteract the samodeyatel'nost' or self-activity, a form of amateur Soviet folklore that aimed to reflect the proletariat's socio-cultural agency, gradually becoming semi-professionalised and staged (Rolf 2013). In the Baltic countries, the samodeyatel'nost' was implemented by Soviet authorities following a hybrid cultural formula, namely, combining Soviet folklore ways with local folklore forms (Rolf 2013)

In contrast, the Baltic neo-folklore fostered by the Baltica festival provided an alternative conceptual reality against the Soviet Union's cultural practices, achieved through neo-pagan folklore and values as a "whole way of life" (Williams 2011[1958]). This notion places culture as a conscious part of social life as in "a religion, a moral code, a system of law, a body of work in the arts" (Williams 2011[1958]:252). This holistic approach to culture also promotes a lifestyle and, to some extent, a commitment to specific ways of doing and thinking. In particular, the International Folklore Festival Baltica aimed to forge a transnational Baltic community built around the idea of creating a network of mutual help, while projecting to the West the idea of Baltic geopolitical unity, namely a common pursuit of freedom, legitimated by a similar past of territorial occupation and repression. The festival portrayed such a communion among Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania through cultural syncretism, a concept noted by Muktupāvels to be "eagerly accepted and circulated among folklorists in the 1980s" (2011:83). Syncretism was perceived as "the original coexistence and unity of text, music, movement, symbolic meaning, and functional context" (ibid). In the analysis of the festival programmes, the said cultural syncretism is revealed in the use of different cultural layers that echoed a pre-modern Baltic culture, instrumentalising the idea of Baltic ethnogenesis, cosmological rituals, a traditional rural community, and the concept of family from an abstract perspective. These categories became a form of self-definition for the Baltica festival community because they legitimised the Baltic regions' historical past and myths, while promoting the idea of a Baltic cultural identity. It can also be argued that projecting the idea of a pre-modern Baltic community enabled the construction of a distinctly Baltic rural and traditional society, connected to its past through rituals stemming from pagan beliefs. Upon a closer examination, it is possible to observe how the use of these narratives shifts according to the needs of the socio-political context.

For instance, in the narratives of the first festival editions of 1987, 1988 and 1989—which coincided with the dawn of the Singing Revolution—there is a clear desire to build national self-confidence, while highlighting the shared cultural practices among the Baltic republics. Also, the programme of the International Folklore Festival Baltica of 1988 framed Latvia as a modern nation, represented by the notion of the traditional family. Latvia was often viewed as a "child of sorrow" (Peters 1988:4) that has endured many hardships, but has maintained its ties to the motherland through folk songs thanks to "the intellectual power of the unbroken early generations in them, their unusually picturesque, poetic world outlook,

the pure ethics and aesthetics of the people, the philosophy verified in the course of centuries by the people" (ibid:6). In 1991, the discourse shifted to the idea of a united Baltic family in a crucial period when the Baltic regions were facing the threat of the Soviet Union's coup d'état after declaring national independence de facto between 1990 and 1991. In the former year, the Baltica festival was cancelled due to Soviet political pressure and an oil blockade (Smidchens 2014). The Baltica 1991 festival programme claimed that the culture and history of hardships bonded the three republics, arguing that: "The Baltic nations confront military force and arms with persistence, strength of soul and feeling of solidarity, which are invigorated and deepened with the help of our songs and dances" (Rüütel 1991:5). These excerpts reveal the willingness to portray a connection between the Baltic regions as a cultural and political resource for building a new society, with a renewed conceptual and moral compass. Arguably, the possibility of enacting an anti-Soviet alternative reality by performing in the festival or joining the festival crowd became the mobilising force of the Baltica festival during the Singing Revolution - in other words, the values, emotions, and collective actions surrounding the Baltic neo-folklore and Baltica festival community constituted the festival's social capital.

However, an analysis of Latvian newspaper articles that covered the Baltica phenomenon through interviews with the festival community revealed a discrepancy between the festival programmes' narratives and the viewpoints of folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and music enthusiasts who participated in the informal Latvian folklore movement. This collective of folklore connoisseurs had different perspectives surrounding the essence of an international folk festival, and the elements that enabled its community's agents to connect. Folklore can lead to a collision between the interests of various sides of a festival movement and, usually, festival leaders contribute to these conflicts, not amateur movement members, who tend to avoid creating ideology and excessive policy (Dziadowiec 2016). In the case of the International Folklore Festival Baltica. the said cluster of folklore connoisseurs wondered if the festival would succeed in a format that included strict planning, large concerts and highly stylised folklore. According to a Latvian newspaper interview with poet and member of the Latvian folklore movement, Knuts Skujenieks, "There should be no spectators, no listeners, no performers. For such a large family, in honour of which guests have arrived, who are also happy and everything works together"1. In the same article, musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš claimed that "folklore is no longer perceived without a relevant social environment, psychological mood. It lives in a family, and neighbourhood. Therefore, it is completely unnatural to gather huge masses of people together in order to "present" folklore"2. Adding to this, Klotiņš stated that Baltic neo-folklore "is an art of situations where communication plays a huge role"3. Another significant insight can be found in the article by folklorist, musician and pedagogue Ilga Reizniece, published by the magazine Liesma (Flame): "the fact that almost all the guests invited to our festival were dance groups seems to ignore a truth known to everyone, because Latvians are still a singing nation". Their views on how Baltic neo-folklore should be interpreted and performed echo the idea of a

<sup>1</sup> Knuts Skujenieks, 'Uz svētkiem un saprašanos ejot', Literatūra un Māksla, 8 July 1988, lines 23-28.

<sup>2</sup> Arnolds Klotinš, 'Uz svētkiem un saprašanos eiot'. Literatūra un Māksla, 8 July 1988, lines 33-37.

small festival's "imagined community" (Anderson 2006[1983]). From this perspective, it can be suggested that different opinions are held on the idea of social capital, as they envisaged the spirituality and cultural wisdom embedded in it as the driving force of the festival community.

Once the national independence of the Baltic republics was successfully restored, the Baltic states seemingly needed to position themselves as old European nations, with a strong intangible cultural heritage. This strong emphasis on rituals reverberated in the festival's performances throughout the period following the restoration of national independence. Drawing from personal observations during festival fieldwork in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia between the years 2017-2019, the festival editions were firmly focused on showcasing the national folklore of the host country, while also highlighting international guest ensembles. It can be argued that the festival's initial framing of social capital, namely Baltic unity, shifted to a cultural layer of indigenous folklore that added to the concept of national culture. This transformation could be explained by Dziadowiec's (2016) postulation that festivals tend to either begin forming a part of the system or break away from it, creating a new structure. At the national level, once the need to establish a sense of Baltic unity dissipated with the achievement of national independence, the Baltic republics gradually abandoned their collective agenda to attend to their own national matters. The Baltic unity marker, once considered "an extremely powerful one in the run-up to independence" (Mole 2012:157), was gradually ignored by national policymakers in parallel with the collective label of the Baltic states as singing nations (Muktupāvela and Lake 2020). Within this context, the International Folklore Festival Baltica endured as a rara avis. Its celebration entailed a private annual meeting of the three Baltic festival organising associations, maintaining the idea of Baltic cultural cooperation.

# Re-Connection as Online Social Capital: The Baltica-Web Forum 2021

The unexpected outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 jeopardised the long-term stability of the Baltica festival with a climate of uncertainty and the halting of social and cultural life, for the first time in its history. The Covid-19 health crisis caused a significant change in



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<sup>4</sup> Ilga Reizniece, 'Pēc\*', Liesma, 1 September 1988, lines 207-212.



paradigms regarding social behaviour and community making, deeply affecting festivals and significantly shifting the memories and emotions people ascribed to being in a festival crowd (Katczynski et al. 2022). As a result, there is a need to research the "emotional, spatial, and social impacts" of the pandemic on festivals (Katczynski et al. 2022:1). However, given the out-of-the-ordinary nature and magnitude of the event, there are no precise guidelines on how to embrace this kind of research properly. For example, how could the International Folklore Festival Baltica thrive in the gradual re-opening of social life under covid-safety rules after having experienced a year of significant social disconnection? Against all predictions, the Baltica festival organisation redefined the festival into the Baltica-Web Forum 2021. This online festival format was held on the 20th-22nd of September for the occasion of Equinox Day and Baltic Unity Day, dedicated to the exploration of "traditional cultural phenomena, the historical and the cultural interrelations of the three Baltic countries" (LNKC 2021). The festival programme of the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 was composed of two parts: one theoretical and one artistic, consisting of scholarly lectures, presentations, debates, workshops and concerts. Under the title "The ethnogenesis and evolution of Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians (of the Balts and the Finno-Ugrians) - historical, cultural and linguistic interconnections and influences" (LNKC 2021), the festival's first day showcased scholarly lectures on diverse topics, such as archaeology, linguistics, mythology, handicrafts, ornamentation, ceremonial roles and old gastronomy (the latter category was explored via a live workshop, in which Baltic neo-folklore specialists provided cookery demonstrations for

traditional recipes). In the evening, a concert was broadcast with historical folk ensembles that participated in the early Baltica editions.

The second day explored "The singing, choreographic and instrumental ceremonial folklore and its early forms regarding the calendar and family celebrations" (LNKC 2021). On this day, the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 hosted scholarly presentations on singing traditions, Baltic instrumental music, choreographic and syncretic folklore and masquerade rituals, concluding with a lecture on Baltic wedding traditions. Then, the third and final day of the festival focused on the "Experiences of preserving folklore traditions in the Baltic States" (LNKC 2021), and was devoted to assessing the role and journey of the Baltica phenomenon, folklore methods, the revitalisation of tradition, and the development of new projects. It also discussed the experiences of portraying and promoting Baltic neo-folklore online, drawing from other cultural projects held during the pandemic. Lastly, the programme hosted a debate on archaic folklore forms. As closure events, the Baltica-Web broadcasted a synchronous performance of traditional dances titled All "Baltica" Dance. For the first time in the Baltica festival history, folk ensembles from the three Baltic republics were dancing at the same time in a boundless space yet united by a digital screen, with the folk dancers from each Baltic recording studio performing with the imagined co-presence of their neighbour republics. The second performance, Ancestral Weaves, showcased a different scale and rhythm, featuring an impressive sun design that was created with small candles which lit up as the performance progressed, resulting in the reveal of the sun imagery surrounded by a circular aura of candles. Set during the evening, the folk singers walked around the candles while dressed in Lithuanian folk costumes, while the dark and silent natural environment surrounding them was reinforced by their spiritual chants. Interestingly, this form of acapella singing is considered an authentic cultural trait shared by former Baltic tribes (Boiko 2000).

The next day, after the end of the festival, a live art installation named *Light for the Ancestors* was opened to the Lithuanian public at Bernardine Garden in Vilnius – the only live festival activity offered.

As planned for the live Baltica festival edition of 2020—which was eventually cancelled—the theme of the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 was 'ritual', which is defined by the official website as the means of being "right here and right now, yesterday and tomorrow, everywhere and always" (LNKC 2021). This definition is embodied by the chosen broadcasting platform of YouTube, which acts as a repository of visual culture that blends the past with the present, rendering it accessible to everyone at any time, through an online connection. Beyond this, YouTube fosters "media sovereignty", namely the "practices through which people exercise the right and develop the capacity to control their images and words, including how these circulate" (Ginsburg 2016:583). Applied to the context of a festival community, the online space becomes a flexible and non-institutional platform to portray the voices and visions of its members, although it also comes with a set of limitations, mainly that this digital divide and the metamorphosis of the

festival audience from spectators into digital users means that they are only able to provide feedback through YouTube's live chat or comments section.

The Baltica-Web Forum 2021 can be read as a repository of shared knowledge, festival experience and performance of the International Folklore Festival Baltica, and therefore the Baltica-Web format can be linked to the online social capital notion. This form of social capital can emerge from the space provided by social media, which allows for the development of new perspectives and generates emotion-based, mobilising resources that stem from solid interpersonal connections (Spottswood and Wohn 2020). The interpretation of the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 as a form of online social capital allows for a slight expansion in the horizons of the current understanding of this notion.

Unlike live Baltica, the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 took place simultaneously and synchronously from the three Baltic countries for the first time. Each country gathered the respective festival organisers, folklore and ethnomusicology scholars and Baltic neo-folklore cultural practitioners in a specific studio. This co-presence of festival actors is unique to the Baltica-Web Forum 2021, as festival organisers and scholars usually acquire a discrete and backstage role. If we interpret the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 as a re-enactment of the festival's beginnings through the concepts of the digital festival community and online space, a deeper understanding of collective emotion and affection emerges. For instance, the Ancestral Weaves art project materialised into a small-scale performance in a natural environment, engaging the online audience in an intimate festival atmosphere accompanied by polyphonic singing. Another example of an emotion-effective strategy is the reflexive approach to the festival's history, which-evidenced by the involvement of the festival organisers of the three countries during the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 debates—highlighted the commitment of the contemporary festival community towards the Baltica festival as a collective creative project of Baltic neo-folklore.

While the Lithuanian organisers emphasised the political milestones achieved by the Baltica festival during the last years of the Soviet Union, the Latvian Baltica organiser recognised that the festival had experienced a significant drop in its audience and popularity, however, she stressed the significance and relevance of the festival to contemporary folk performers. From this perspective, the digital festival provided a sense of network re-connection and an online social capital based on open and transparent communication between the Baltic festival community actors, arguably cementing new social foundations for continuing the commitment to celebrate the festival in the near future. These examples represent a willingness to stay connected to the past through the present: a way of being within the festival's cultural memory. Beyond this, the unique format of the online Baltica is also a reminder that festivals can be resilient in difficult times, because they are dynamic socio-cultural phenomena that are constantly present and evolving.

# **Connecting the Past and Present:** Umberto Eco's Cultural Encyclopaedia

The striking resemblance of the initial festival Baltica narratives and the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 can be interpreted as a redefinition of meaning at the International Folklore Festival Baltica in the online space through compelling familiar narratives. As mentioned in the abstract of this paper, during the Singing Revolution (1987-1991), there was a fundamental need to bring civil society together through mass gatherings, such as festivals, where they could experience collective euphoria. As presented above, the Baltic countries' post-Soviet era led to a focus on the idea of representing intangible cultural heritage and gradually abandoned the geopolitical dimension of the festival. However, along with the coronavirus pandemic came the emergence of a new need: the upkeep of ties among the actors participating in the Baltic neo-folklore scene. Social distancing and halted mobility were not obstacles to building a digital folklore project for the Baltic countries in a web forum format. Within this atypical format, the research and knowledge of folklorists and ethnomusicologists were equally, if not more, significant than folk performances. Nevertheless, the factor that rendered this online festival compelling from a research viewpoint, were the commonalities between the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 festival programme and the opinions shared by folklorists and ethnomusicologists of the Baltic folklore movement in newspaper articles published in the late 1980s.

Exploring this parallelism by uniting two highly dynamic periods of the International Folklore Festival Baltica, this paper has proposed implementing Umberto Eco's idea of "cultural encyclopaedia" (1984) to interpret the meaning-making processes surrounding the festival's narrative scheme. Eco's notion has been considered a fundamental contribution of the author to the field of semiotics (Lorusso 2015), and a connecting element between the theory of knowledge and the theory of interpretation (Violi 1998). This cultural encyclopaedia marked "the transition from the code conceived as a rule to establish signification and interpretation, to a system of possible inferences, where a certain degree of choice and interpretative freedom can be accommodated" (ibid:25). Since festivals and festival communities are constituted by meanings in constant dialogue and transformation, Eco's approach could be promising for enhancing understanding of the temporal and narrative dynamics of festivals.

The cultural encyclopaedia can be defined as a colossal library in which books converse with one another, produce intertextual links, and exhibit potential meanings that can be used to generate new signs (Desogus 2012), but the ability to render the encyclopaedia's cultural material intelligible and meaningful relies on members of an interpretive community (Eco 1984). The readers of the cultural encyclopaedia act as interpreters, based on their previous knowledge of a given text or culture (Bianchi 2015), and in this process pick the most appropriate text, then disclose different and partial degrees of grasping the entire cultural encyclopaedia as a repertoire of potential interpretations (ibid). It is, however, important to note that the cultural encyclopaedia cannot be understood in its totality, and it is also

unrepresentable because it must accommodate divergent interpretations and contrasting divisions of the continuum (ibid).

When applied to a festival framework, the cultural encyclopaedia is shaped into a repository of festival narratives embodied by festival programmes or memorabilia, whose re-discovery holds the potential to re-enact past meanings, memories and emotions. In the case of the Baltica-Web Forum 2021, Eco's cultural encyclopaedia becomes a fruitful concept from which to understand the initial festival narratives and spirit. along with the notions of Baltic unity and Baltic cultural identity. The readers of the festival's cultural encyclopaedia were festival organisers, folklorists and ethnomusicologists, whose contributions allowed them to design a kaleidoscope of scholarly interpretations of Baltic neo-folklore. Following Eco's rationale, the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 actors interpreted the online Baltica format as a cultural text exclusively concerning the Baltic countries, guided by their previous knowledge and experiences with the Baltica festival. Since the cultural encyclopaedia cannot be known as a whole, the material generated in the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 could not have been foreseen in previous festival editions, as it was a response to the massively unusual context of the coronavirus pandemic. Hence, expanding the knowledge of a festival's history and differentiating between periods of high activity and stability might be helpful in better interpreting festivals in times of uncertainty.

# Conclusions

This article explored the transformation undergone by the International Folklore Festival Baltica during the coronavirus pandemic's new normality phase, which crystallised into the online folklore project Baltica-Web Forum 2021. Despite the sample constraints of this study, the interpretive analysis illustrated that investigating festivals' temporality dimension is critical for providing a more holistic understanding of festivals. The ethnographic approach was valuable for interpreting their often hidden inner dynamics and the factors that successfully bond a festival community, as emotional ties and experience are deeply subjective. It showed that migrating to an online festival does not necessarily imply a total disconnection from the live festival's meaning and emotion - in fact, it provided an opportunity to analyse the festival from a different perspective, decoding broader patterns that might be dormant during periods of socio-cultural and political stability. Arguably, the online space as a boundless and open arena allowed for new forms of creativity that moved away from the institutional structures and artistic guidelines that are often imposed on festival communities. In addition, the Baltica-Web Forum 2021 is an example of the re-connection of a festival community's direction and values, paradoxically taking place in a period marked by social distancing and restricted mobility. This was achieved by conferring a prominent role to scholarly lectures by folklorists and ethnomusicologists who were not in the International Folklore Festival Baltica's spotlight, rethinking the idea of the festival community and network and moving beyond the international folk festivals' format that echoes the idea of a patchwork of indigenous cultures.

The first section of this paper explored the idea of connections as social capital, arguing that the festival's initial vision and mission were grounded on the idea of establishing a solid network that could be mobilised for national identity purposes. However, an analysis of newspaper articles revealed that some members of the informal Baltic folklore movement held a different understanding of the festival's social capital, which was more oriented towards an authentic spiritual connection among the festival community actors. The second section proposed an understanding of the online re-connection of not-so-visible members of the festival community with the Baltica festival project as a form of online social capital. Nevertheless, perhaps the most ambitious contribution of this article is the interpretation of a connection between the festival's origins and the covid-safe Baltica format through Umberto Eco's concept of "cultural encyclopaedia" (1984). This paper claimed that the International Folklore Festival Baltica could be interpreted as a multinarrative space that can be revisited and instrumentalised in the present when necessary. In so doing, the festival could be the catalyst in making the alienating, uncertain socio-political scenario of the pandemic into something more meaningful, building bridges with former festival community actors who shared a particular vision of the festival's narratives and criteria on the performances. This understanding brought to the surface the realisation that a festival community of a well-established celebration could reconnect in the online space, creating new meanings while preserving the festival's cultural memory in the most unexpected circumstances.

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# INTERVIEW MARLON GRIFFITH: CONNECTING ART, COMMUNITY AND CARNIVAL

By Dr R. L. de Matas

Griffith, Marlon, 'Marlon Griffith: Connecting Art, Community, and Carnival', (interviewed by R. L. de Matas for *Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis*, 2.1, 4 March 2023, 68-107)

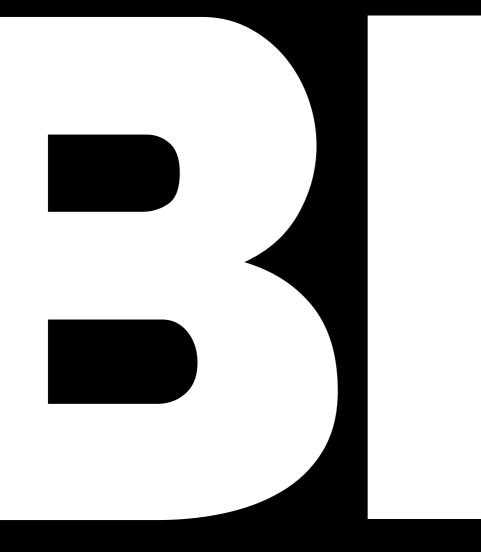


# **Marlon Griffith**

(b. 1976, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago) started his artistic practice as a Carnival designer-a "mas' man," as Trinidadians would call him. This background deeply shapes his work as a contemporary visual artist, which has performative, participatory, and ephemeral characteristics that derive from Carnival. Griffith's work is based upon a reciprocal dialogue between 'Mas' (the artistic component of the Trinidad Carnival) and art as a means of investigating the phenomenological aspect of the embodied experience: it is situated at the intersection of the visual and public performance. Experimenting with fundamental questions in perception, Griffith's work interrogates contemporary culture outside the traditional pitfalls of representation. Operating outside the context of Mas' Griffith performative actions are stripped down to their basic form and abstracted to create new images and narratives that respond critically and poetically to our socio-cultural environment.

Griffith has been an artist in residence at Bag Factory / Fordsburg Artists Studios in Johannesburg (2004); Mino Paper Art Village in Japan (2005); Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts, Kingston, Jamaica (2007); and Popop Studios, Nassau, The Bahamas (2010-11); and Art Omi, Ghent, New York (2011). He has shown extensively in North America and Europe (South-South: Interruptions & Encounters, 2009); Miami (Global Caribbean, 2010); Washington (Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions, Art Museum of the Americas, 2011); Champaign (Krannert Art Museum, 2011) and other locations and internationally in Gwangju (7th Gwanju Biennale, 2008) and Cape Town (CAPE09, 2009) MANIFESTA 9 Parallel Projects 2012, Hasselt, Belgium, AICHI TRIENNALE 2013, TATE MODERN BMW Tate Live Series 2014, AGYU(Art Gallery of York University) 2015 and ART DUBAI(U.A.E.) 2019, 14th HAVANA BIENAL(Havana, Cuba) DOCUMENTA 15 (Kassel, Germany).

In 2010, Marlon was the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and of a Commonwealth Award. He has been residing and working in Nagoya, Japan since 2009.







FCIA is dedicated to culture and practitioners within the cultural space inspired by festivals, rituals, celebrations, carnivals, gatherings, etc., and its work helps shine a light on ideas, embodied experiences, and alternative perspectives. It is our opinion that festivals are ideal venues for celebrating art, culture, heritage, and tradition.

Trinidad and Tobago visual contemporary artist. Griffith's work plays an essential role in carnival art practice, culture, and the arts. Griffith began his artistic career working in carnival arts and later evolved into a visual contemporary artist. In his art, he combines traditional and modern elements. A number of the artist's pieces have been exhibited internationally in galleries and Griffith is a master of his craft and an inspiration to many. museums. In his installations and performance-based pieces, he explores themes of identity, culture, place, and space, challenging viewers to imagine new possibilities. Through his art, he makes a powerful and bold statement about commercialism. This encourages viewers to think critically and question carnival processes and practices. He has been praised for his innovative use of materials.

I first encountered Griffith's work while studying for my postgraduate degree. My search was to find a contemporary artist whose work exhibits a crossover between art, carnival, and performance. Upon discovering Griffith's carnivalesque pieces, I was intrigued. His work challenges traditional boundaries between art and carnival, not just visually, but also conceptually. He seems to have created a space that allows him to explore his creativity beyond carnival. The skills he acquired from his days as a mas' man, the residency he held as an artist in residence, and his current standing as a contemporary artist have allowed him to explore and refine his artistic style further. His art is a form of expression that is both meaningful and joyful. His work celebrates the beauty of making and explores deeper aspects of performance, embodied experiences, and community work.

His appetite for community involvement was demonstrated early in his career when he ventured beyond the local community to work collaboratively to create meaningful projects outside Trinidad and Tobago. While living in Trinidad, he designed costumes and participated in the Notting Hill Carnival in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Griffith collaborated with *Elimu* Mas' Academy in collaboration with Paddington Arts, which has a community youth In this volume, we look at the work of Marlon Griffith, a centre. He embraced working with *Elimu's* children's band. This came about through designing a children's band in Trinidad. He explains: "I was doing a children's band in Trinidad, and one of the parents of the masqueraders told me she had an uncle who brought a band to the UK. She asked me if I would be interested in working with him."

> In our discussion earlier this year, he discussed his process, practice, and community work and projects. The following is a record of our discussion, and he provides insights into his work and the stories behind it.





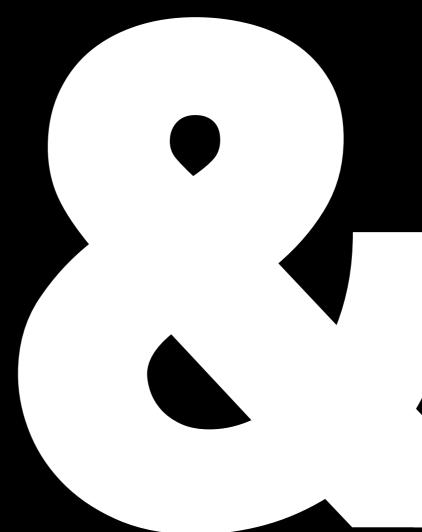


In this interview, I would like to delve into your journey of becoming, exploring some of your experiences from being a mas' man to becoming a contemporary visual artist, along with your artistic approach to contemporary art. Think of a young Marlon picking up our journal and using it as a basis of inspiration and education, not necessarily handholding per se, but more like a compass. So, briefly, how did your journey as a mas' man begin?

And it [was] quite by accident I started making mas'. I was Hmm, I knew I always wanted to be an artist. What direction to take? I was never really sure. 'Cause you know, the working with someone, and they took me, I can't even dream, the ideal scenario would be to go to art school, remember how I ended up there, I think it was helping them with something. I was helping them collect material that type of thing. You know, live the artist's dream. But that never manifest. So, like many of my contemporaries and buying stuff one day, [and] they were taking it back and artists before me, I attended the John Donaldson to their workshop. Technical Institute (John D), which is like a trade school based in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. At the time, 'John D' had a And then I got there, and I realised it was a mas' camp, graphic arts programme that was considered very strong. but a very small one. And I discovered the person had a

I went to 'John D'. I did the graphic design programme, and what you get is like a technical diploma. But I never really practised as a graphic designer. It wasn't really what I wanted to do. It was the closest thing to fill the void, just to put it another way.

So, I did a graphic design programme, but even before see it finished. So, I just got hooked. I just got so deeply that, I discovered making mas'. Now I played mas' as a child, and enjoyed doing it, but I never saw myself getting involved in it so intensely, you know. When I started going to secondary school, I wanted to be an artist, but I didn't know what direction that would take.



children's band. And I just kind of started helping them, you know, and it wasn't a planned thing. [As you know], with mas' camps, you go once, it might be curiosity, and then you go back and then you get hooked on doing this thing, you know?

And for me it's like, I started this process and I wanted to involved in the process of doing this thing. And after some years, eventually I had left the group.





# What happened after leaving the group?

I had kind of fallen outta love with carnival in a sense. I was there and I was doing it, but I wasn't doing what I in Trinidad until eventually I told her, 'I'm coming into Portwanted to do, or at least that's what I thought. I wanted to of-Spain. I'm going to drop by,' because at this stage, it's be an artist, you know? When people talk about art, you know, it's this very specific thing, whether you're drawing or painting or doing sculpture. But I wasn't really focused on any of those things. And, making mas' for me, after a Every day she would call. She's like, 'You change your while, it was no longer fun – you know, I wasn't enjoying it anymore. It became a chore. And when it became a chore, I didn't want to do it.

So eventually I had stopped for like a year and I decided, you know, I've had enough of this. And during that year I was doing the art things, so I was doing the drawing and contacted me out to the blue, it was a principal of a school, and she said that they [were] working on this children's to design the band. band for the following year. And she said, 'You're the best person for the job.' And I was like, 'I don't do this I was like, I never agreed to anything. stuff anymore. I could direct you to other people who could help you."

But she kept insisting that I had to be the person. And every day she called me. I said, 'I'll think about it, and I will call you back.' And she kept calling me like every day. [She I look at her and I'm like, 'The children are going to be was calling me like every day.] Now, I was doing another

project, it was like a small residency up in the mountains like, I wanna see this person face-to-face because over the phone they're not getting message.

mind?' The person who told her about me, his child was going to the school, but he was also a very good friend and a mentor, and continues to be to this day.

And his wife was actually my art teacher in secondary school. So all these connections. So, eventually, I do go to see her [the principal at the school]. I walk into this school, that type of stuff. And while I was doing that, someone and I walk into her office and she starts announcing to whoever is in the office [that] I am the person who is going

So, she pulls out all the drawings and I look at them and I'm going through these drawings and in my mind it's like, these things are awful.

wearing this?' And she's like, 'Yeah.' And she's like, 'We want your input into this.'

But they wanted a king or a queen costume to go with it. She was so passionate about this band. And when I saw what they were doing, I told her, 'I'm gonna redesign the costume, because they already picked a theme and all of that.' And the children already had in their minds what the theme [was]. 'But, I can't promise to be here like a hundred percent, because I'm doing another project.'

I did the design. I designed it and I gave it to them. And then I asked, 'Who's going to be making it?' And they said that they'll be making the costumes. I asked, 'Have you ever done anything like this before?'

They said, 'Yeah, we did a little.' Then they showed me some pictures from something, and I was like, 'Oh my God.' And then the next thing you know I was pulled into making the costumes. And that was the first of, I think, about five or six bands I did for them (the school).

The first time I did it for them, it was a very small – it was a very small band. The queen costume did really, really well. And that gave them motivation. So, the following year, before Christmas even came around, the phone was ringing: 'We need you.' And the following year they won, they won everything, and year after year they just kept doing better and better.

But while that was happening, something else was happening with me. Like, I was still trying to figure out the art thing. And what started happening was I started doing a lot of experimentation with materials. At the time I was so involved in carnival, doing the children's bands and other things.

I was working with this material and kind of questioning what happens to it, you know, because carnival is such an ephemeral thing. You know, there's this intensity that happens for a very short period, and then it's gone and there's all this stuff that's left behind. So, it became a question of: what happens after?

So I started doing a lot of experiments with materials I would use during carnival and started making installations and stuff that started to get noticed - but also working outside of the carnival period. I was kind of curious to see how the process functions outside the context of the carnival space. The festival has to happen for this burst of energy to occur. But what happens if you take it and drop it outside of its context?





# What was the outcome of your experiments?

I started doing all these projects. It started off very small, like small interventions. The first kind of small intervention happened in South Africa. I was doing a residency. I was think she got kind of caught off-guard as well with carnival there for three months, and at the end of the three months I decided to do, like, a small type of procession, [a] carnival type of intervention. During the period, I got people kind of hyped about it, and I was doing workshops with people, talking about the process, talking about the history of carnival - you know, the things it generates, and characters and all these things.

And for the opening, we had this small event that really kind of blew my mind, where people just kind of showed up doing their own thing. It was planned, but it wasn't planned. I was really, really shocked to see the amount of people that turned up and decided to do their own thing, or put their own interpretation of what I told them of framed it into their own kind of context of the current state of South Africa, and those types of things. So that was the first action or intervention, if you want to call it that. And then over time, it just kind of built up.

Things really started taking off when this curator [I told you about], Claire Tancons, came to Trinidad. Like me, I and all of its processes, and she saw art happening in the middle of all of it. And sometimes it takes someone from outside your space to see the potential in something.

She started writing about carnival, but from a more critical perspective, and really shaping it. She started talking about carnival the way people would talk about a painting, you know? Like, this is art too. She really started to shape and frame and put a context around this thing (carnival).

And we worked on a number of projects together, doing biennials and projects at biennials. And people started taking notice of it. The other thing is, not everybody's going to get it. There'll always be people who are kind about, carnival and the process and the history. They kind of like, 'Well, I don't know about this.' Because in the arts, world performance for them is closer to, I guess, choreographed dance. And also, when people talk about art, it's a very Eurocentric perspective. So, art [for them] does not happen outside of a Western and European sphere. You know, drawing, painting, sculpture, it's abstract art, it's performance, and anything anybody else has to offer is irrelevant. It continues to be a challenge at times. Every so often there's a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, when people like yourself and others contact me out to the blue and say they came across this thing [my work]. Usually when the person contacts you, they're really passionate about - not necessarily carnival, but they're really interested in how this process shapes, or is perceived within, the context of a bigger world

from the way you have embodied carnival as well as your experience living in South Africa during your brief residency. What is your take on how people in Trinidad and Tobago embody and remake carnival traditions?

People just don't, at least to me, see it beyond the tradition. like an open studio where people were free to come in, They have narrowed the tradition. I think it's one of the engage, talk, participate. And whatever comes out of reasons why I feel carnival now suffers so much. I mean, those conversations during that process would be not carnival, not long ago, ended in Trinidad, and what little necessarily the final thing, because I always feel like it's I saw of it was really disappointing. To me, there was just an ongoing discussion. no energy to it whatsoever. And it has been like that for a very long time. I always feel like there's a failure to engage The project might be over, but there's still questions [carnival] on another level, which is something I always try lingering after the project, and I continue trying to find to do with my work. And I've really tried to change [my] way answers to those questions. The way I work now, I always of working. So, it's no longer just about carnival. Like, I tell feel like carnival shouldn't just be the music - there's the people I feel there have been phases in the development fêting, there's the rivalry, there's all that stuff. But one of of my work and my process. In the beginning, I started the things that [it] lacks is a form of what I explore: a level using the mas' camp type process of working. So, when of civil engagement, and really trying to understand not I did my residencies, my studio space was essentially just people, but the city you navigate.

# Your experience so far demonstrates the idea of embodiment,







Time-wise and in terms of One of the last prossessions that I did [was] relating to your creative process, can you tell me a bit more about your experience of working between carnival and your residencies?

the book that you saw, (Symbols of Endurance). It was a project I did in Toronto, which happened around, very close to Caribana. Before, like I said, I used the mas' camp process, so it would be a very short, very intense process of working. Regarding residencies, these periods would last like two to three months. Within that period of time, I [would] try to create. Sometimes there might be a pre-planned idea, and when you get there, things change - sometimes the people you meet and the project kind of evolves into something else during my time there.

But, with more recent projects, I look at it in the long term. So, developing a project will take, like, a year to two years. And what happens over that period of time is really what matters, because what I try to do is build a community around the project. So, instead of the short, intense period, I build a community of people that are solely invested in the project and bringing [in] people from different parts of the community.

Who are you engaging with in the communities you are working towards creating? And what boosts your community engagement?

In the project in Toronto, I worked with a whole spectrum of people from all over Toronto and its environments. I had spoken with poets, and this was a group of young people. I worked with a group of young fashion designers from another community, dancers with disabilities, capoeira athletes, and the Mississaugas of New Credit the indigenous people of Toronto.

These are groups of people who have never worked or encountered each other before, and putting them in a room together is a whole other people management thing. But it's not just people management. What we did for the project was realise we had to create a common unity. We had to create, like, a language for the project.



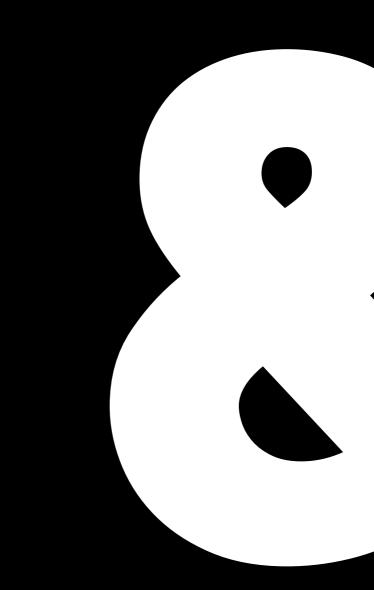




The Mississauga of New Credit, they have teachings, The procession usually has another life to it. So, when the like wisdom, strength and unity - that helps. procession is over, there tends to be a physical exhibition And we had these, teachings that people focus on that of elements from the procession, combined with drawings we aimed to strive for during the project. And it didn't and sculptures and those type of elements. But here we took it to another level. We had the exhibition after the matter who you [were], or where you [were] from. And what was happening [was], and without us realising procession, but what was happening was these people, it, a community was being built over that period of time. during this two-year period, continued together, building this community, and started doing their own projects. So, all these people who would not necessarily work They continued building on their own and building other together were now communicating, collaborating, networks from what we started. So, even after I'm gone, and making work together. But also, there was a they may not be making mas' or building costumes or question, which has always been a question in my work: anything like that, but whatever they're interested in, the question of sustainability, or [what] happens they are now using that same process to build other after the project is over - what usually happens communities and connect in the same way.

with other projects.

I think you answered my question about what boosts your community engagement. You explained about creating a language for the project and common unity. In my opinion, there seems to be a positive reward coming out of this endeavour. It shows you are not just supporting people who have never encountered each other before to become invested in just the project, but rather to help them become more invested in their environment long-term, because the language and the type of engagement enhances their quality of cohesion and communication. Tell me more about how you went about working with these groups and how you facilitated people management to support everyone in focusing on the main goal.







# Tell us about your other experiences of working abroad. How did you begin working outside of Trinidad and Tobago?

I did it for three years. From 2006 to 2008, I worked And I said, uh, said we could talk. And he [the uncle] with *Elimu* and Paddington Arts in Westbourne Park. Every year, *Elimu* put out a band in collaboration children's band, and was with the band on the road with Paddington Arts, which was, like, a community youth type centre close to Westbourne Park Station. It's like, two, three minutes' walk from Westbourne Park Station.

I was living in Trinidad and flying to the UK. So what like, mixed reviews of the experience doing the Notting happened was I was doing my own project in Trinidad. I was designing for a children's band and one of the, uh, parents of the masqueraders told me she had this uncle who brings a band [to] the UK if I would be interested in working with them.

came to Trinidad that year. He came and he saw the for the day. Yeah. And, he liked what he saw and then, he made an offer.

So, I decided, and I said I [would] try it only for one year, and because I [knew] other people that did it, and I had, Hill carnival. I did the first year and they did really, really well. And I mean, the experience was, it was definitely a culture shock. London is definitely not Port-of-Spain. I went on to do two more years with *Elimu* and Paddington Arts.

# Did you get another opportunity to collaborate with Elimu?

I actually came back to London in 2015. I was doing a project for Tate Modern. I collaborated with Elimu again. So, I use[d] some of their masqueraders for my project at the Tate Modern. I used some of their space to create all the work and everything. So, my project was happening during the Notting Hill Carnival, so both our projects were happening [at the same time]. It was an interesting dynamic.

# What aspects of your work do you most enjoy, or what's the most fulfilment you get from the work that you do?

I'd say building/connecting communities is the most fulfilling. I mean it is something I never really, actually thought about. It's the first time anybody has ever asked me that question. The most fulfilling thing I really enjoy is seeing people connect. Yeah, I really like looking at people. I mean people [can] be really terrible sometimes, but at the same time human beings are so fascinating. Like, I could sit down and just observe at people all day. And there's so many things, so many different characteristics, and things people do and say, that could really make you wonder that we have the potential for so much. I really like seeing people happy, it's really an amazing thing to see - but not just happy; it's good to see people engaged. And when you see people happy and connecting, it is also a really amazing thing. In my workshops, when I see a group of young people in a room, doing something they've never done before and working with people that they only just met probably a few minutes or a few hours ago, and they look like the happiest people, even though they might be complaining about how hard the work might be, who's gotten cut or burnt from a glue gun - they're still enjoying themselves because they feel good to be part of something. I think that one of the challenges in society in general is a lot of people don't feel connected to, or feel part of, anything.







Some artists may connect their work with, I suppose, link their personality with art. For others, it might be separate, and their art, personality, or emotions are not interconnected. How would you define your work and what it means to be you?

Generally, I'm actually a shy person. I like spending time with people, but I generally spend a lot of time by myself. I like my time. I'm not the guy who's gonna get up and introduce himself to the crowd, but yet I do that with the work. There's Marlon, and then there's the work - that other side.

# What did you do while transitioning from mas' man to artist?

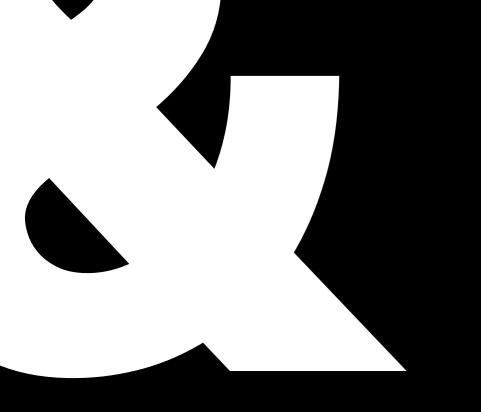
I was doing other things. I was doing illustrations for magazines, just freelance work. Being freelance was intentional because I didn't want to be stuck in an office working for somebody else. I wanted that freedom to create and do whatever I wanted. It was really important to me. It was hard as well. When you're freelancing, it sounds like you're free, but you're never really sure when the next pay cheque is going to come, and you have to be kind of on your toes. There were hard times, but I think once my practice started to come together, other things started opening up for me. And I'm living in Japan now, and even being here wasn't planned.

from the way you have embodied carnival as well as your experience living in South Africa during your brief residency. What is your take on how people in Trinidad and Tobago embody and remake carnival traditions?

People just don't, at least to me, see it beyond the tradition. free to come in, engage, talk, participate. And whatever They have narrowed the tradition. I think it's one of the comes out of those conversations during that process reasons why I feel carnival [2023]now suffers so much. would be not necessarily the final thing, because I always I mean, carnival, not long ago, ended in Trinidad, and what feel like it's an ongoing discussion. little I saw of it was really disappointing. To me, there was just no energy to it whatsoever. And it has been like that The project might be over, but there's still questions for a very long time. I always feel like there's a failure to lingering after the project, and I continue trying to find engage [carnival] on another level, which is something answers to those questions. The way I work now, I always I always try to do with my work. And I've really tried to feel like carnival shouldn't just be the music – there's the change [my] way of working. So, it's no longer just about fêting, there's the rivalry, there's all that stuff. But one of carnival. Like, I tell people I feel there have been phases the things that [it] lacks is a form of what I explore: a level in the development of my work and my process. In the of civil engagement, and really trying to understand not beginning, I started using the mas' camp type process of just people, but the city you navigate. working. So, when I did my residencies, my studio space was essentially like an open studio where people were



# Your experience so far demonstrates the idea of embodiment,



# What made you decide to move to Japan?

Coming here wasn't even actually a plan. Another artist in Trinidad, at the time we weren't friends, but he did the residency. And when he came back to Trinidad, in a similar way to the principal [at] the school who kept calling me, he did the same, telling me I should apply for this residency. Anytime I saw him, he kept asking: 'Marlon, have you applied?' And eventually one day I saw him, and he brought the application [form]. He said 'Apply for this', and I said, 'Okay.' The thing is, when I applied for the residency, they had this website. I thought, 'Is this real?' And he kept hustling me about this. I did apply and got accepted. It turned out to be one of the and that went really well. I finished the residency, went best experiences I've had in my life.

I didn't stay immediately. The first time I came [to Japan], I was working a lot with paper and cardboard and those type[s] of materials. And they haven't specifically catered towards people who work with paper. So, the city where I did my residency, they make this special paper called washi - washi paper.

I use[d] the paper in printmaking. I was there for three months and they taught us how to make washi paper, the whole process. We had to use washi to make our final works for an exhibition at the end of the residency, back to Trinidad, and I thought, 'What's next?' And they contacted me again from Japan. They said they [were] having this other project and they wanted me to participate. And I came back again.

# What's the medium you most enjoy working with?

Paper.

# Why paper?

Il first started making marks with paper one year. A few years ago, I did a project in Dubai, and I used a lot Then there was a band leader at the time, and he had of cardboard. I used so much cardboard [that] when it this idea, and he was talking about this guy making was done, they - I couldn't take it with me. They were just mas' using cardboard. And eventually we met him. going to dump it after I left. So, I thought there was an And yes, he was fantastic. His name was Michael Sheriff; architecture school, and they always need cardboard for he passed away many moons ago. I really admired his building models. I decided to give them the cardboard. work. I was doing stuff with paper before, but nothing So, the cardboard had a second life. really, nothing serious. Nothing as in-depth as what he was doing.

Cardboard was cheap, it was accessible, I just didn't have the money. I had to make do with whatever resources available. Whenever I had the opportunity, I would go to Michael's workspace. There was one other guy that worked with him. And I would just go there and watch.

I would never do anything. We would just be talking. I would just look at him walking and it blew my mind. He made it look so easy. Eventually, I started quietly experimenting. I started kind of pushing myself and experimenting and doing projects with people, and discovered that I was really comfortable using cardboard.

I have experimented with plastics. I was never much into wire per se. I like metals. I've done some work with copper and aluminium. I'm always looking for new materials and new things to use with my work.

But I always go back to paper, you know, when all else fails, you know, I go back to basics, and while I'm doing that, something else might pop up.

# Have you used recycled materials?

Yes, I tend to use a lot of recycled materials, so a lot of recycled paper, cardboard, sometimes recycled plastics. I try to avoid as best as I can using plastics, 'cause beyond storage, you know, it's, like, once I'm finished using it, like I don't really have - there's [not] much I can do with it.





# How would you describe your creative process or your preparatory work?

I tend to do a lot of drawing. I might do a lot of reading as well. It depends on your project, but I tend to do a lot of reading, research, and drawing. I try to talk to as Imanyl people within the community Ias I canl. And whomever I'm working Iwith], I try to have as many conversations with them as possible to try and really understand the space that I'm in and get different points of views of about that community. But my process – I would say I go through a very rigorous process. I do hundreds of sketches before I get to a final drawing. Even when I finish the final drawing, I'm still doing sketches, because I always feel like there's something that could be improved upon. It's one of the things I hate: that I never feel satisfied. I always feel like there's something that could be better or could be changed. Have you modified or made tools to suit your work, or particular jobs that you do in your work?

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I think a lot of mask men make their own tools depending on what they're doing. Sometimes you have to fashion your own tools for doing something very specific. I always have to create these strange templates for cutting cardboard and adapting the knife to cut the board the way I want, so it doesn't cut a certain way on the board, and I tend to do that a lot.

I may not make a lot of new tools, but when it comes to surfaces, I might start with one surface. But I like changing the surface of things, so the texture of it changes, or the look and feel of it changes.



# PHOTO ESSAY **PORTRAITS OF** CARNIVAL LAND

# By Catherine Sforza, in-house photographer

Catherine Sforza has loved photography since her father gave her a camera at just eight years old. She became involved in cultural arts through her love of Carnival in 2017, going on to become Road Manager for Moko Somokow (an award-winning Moko Jumbie band) in 2019 and 2020. These experiences have led her to pursue Project Management as well as continue her commitment to the arts. She is passionate about preserving and documenting Trinidad's stories and she has been doing so through 1000mokos, the Alice Yard Lost and Found project and her collaborations with Method Moda. Don't be surprised if you see her walking on Stilts through the streets of Port-of-Spain some morning!

# instagram.com/sforzamedia

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Sforza, Catherine, 'Portraits of Carnival Land', *Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis*, 2.1, (2023), 108-129

# FEATURING

# Launch of Carnival

Moko Jumbies, Kaisokah instagram.com/juniorbisnath

Stephanie Kanhai, Lady Moko instagram/stephaniekanhai

Jason Meighoo, Dragon facebook.com/profile. php?id=100063634685236

Stephanie Kanhai, Lady Moko instagram/stephaniekanhai

Fédon Honoré, Midnight Robber instagram.com/ masterofkilleroratory

Special thanks to the National Carnival Commission instagram.com/ncc\_tt

# Kings and Queens Semi Finals

Shynel Brizan portraying Aimee, a Dancer of Freedom's Cousinship to Epitaphs of Fate instagram.com/jab\_queen\_

Jamal Arneaud instagram.com/jamsss\_27

Jada Fourniller instagram.com/jadafournillier08

Russell Grant portraying The Resurrection Mule instagram.com/russell.grant.7731

Joel Lewis portraying Waterfall Oracle instagram.com/mokomasters.tt

Robert Young, The Cloth, Vulgar Fraction mas' band

Robert Young instagram.com/insideready The Cloth instagram.com/theclothofficial Vulgar Fraction instagram.com/vulgar\_fraction

# St James Traditional Characters' Competition & Emancipation Day Parade

Moko Jumbies from Kaisokah are pictured in the Emancipation photos under the tutelage of Junior Bisnath instagram.com/juniorbisnath

Moko Somokow instagram.com/mokosomokow

Gorilla, King Kong Krew instagram.com/kingkongkrew\_1































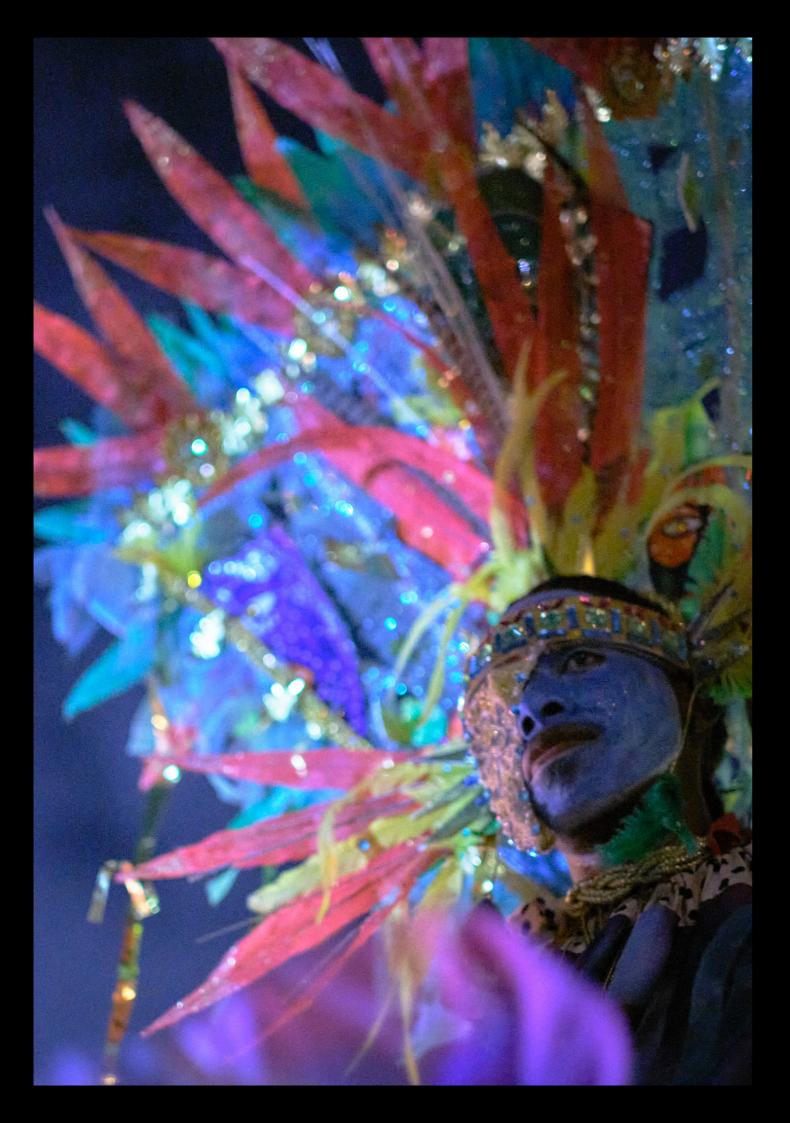




































































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INTERVIEW CARLOS GONZALEZ XIMENEZ

Masks, Masquerades and Rituals: Keeping Ancient Culture Alive

By Dr R. L. de Matas

Images © Carlos González Ximénez



# Tell us about yourself.

I was born in Madrid, Spain, in 1961, to a large family with 13 siblings. My father was the Bank Of Spain's photographer, which allowed me to have contact with the dark room of the photographic laboratory from an early age, and awakened my fascination with photography processing and developing. Although I had been an illustrator and created wild animals' illustrations for nature guides, it was not until I was 20 years old that I decided to pursue photography as a means of creating.

My profession and hobbies were always related to nature. For 30 years, I have been and continue to be an arborist, working in gardens and forests to maintain their health. It is a job that allows me to combine my love for nature with my photography abilities, by capturing the beauty and vitality of natural surroundings in pictures.



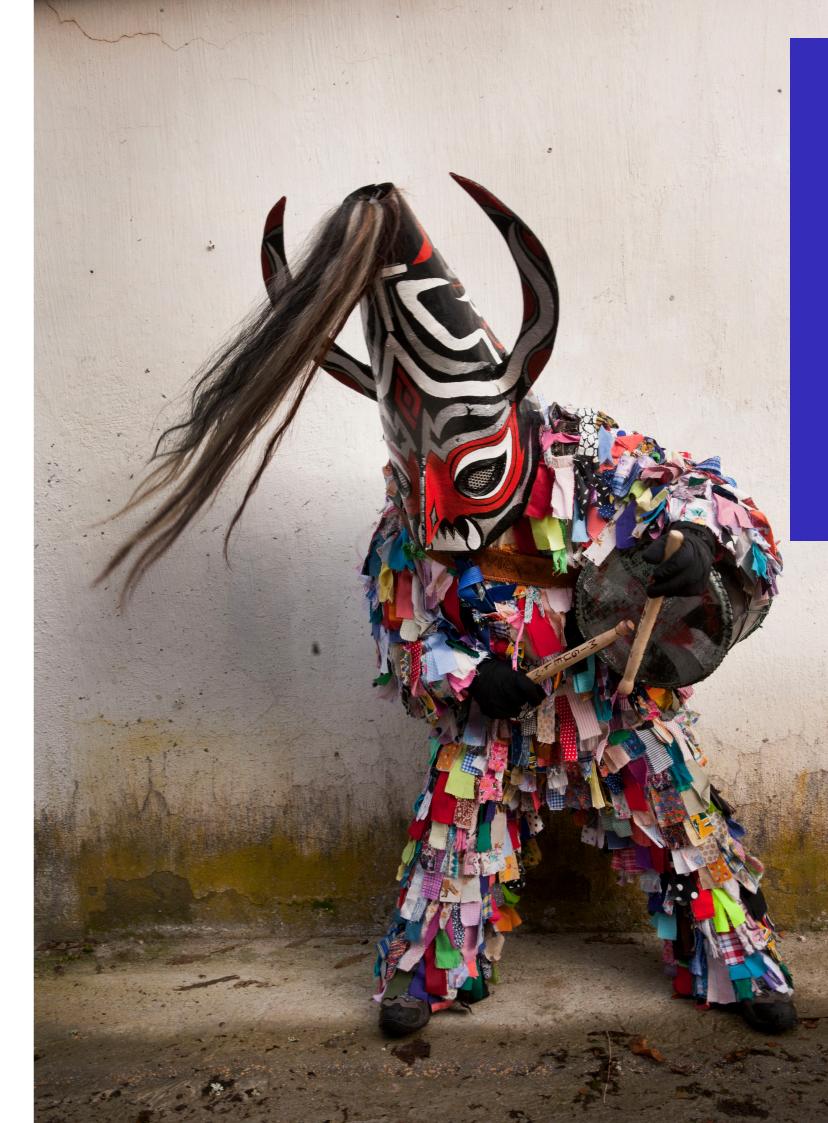


# Is there something you would like to say about photography in general? For example, what it means for you?

Photography is a powerful visual language that has the ability to transmit emotions, tell stories and capture meaningful moments. Like music or writing, it can affect our senses and reach the soul of its observers. For me, photography has a profound meaning because of my intimate relationship with photographic art. This connection influences my particular approach towards photographic projects.

The beauty of photography and projects resides in the research, travels and adventures that go with them. Through photography, I can explore new places, immerse myself in different cultures and discover unique perspectives. Photography provides me with the opportunity to capture those moments and share my personal view of the world with others.







# 3

# What do you like to convey through your photographs?



Through my photographs, I wish to convey ancient knowledge and practices in their artistic forms, especially in relation to masks and traditional garments. By illustrating these cultural manifestations, I seek to share the experiences of their life and work, capturing the world that surrounds it and giving it my personal interpretation.

Photography has the power to transport us to other places—whether through natural landscapes or urban photography—allowing us to explore different worlds and cultures. In my case, I use photography as a way of documenting and giving relevance to rituals and their meanings, which often are unnoticed in everyday life. Through my pictures, I capture fleeting moments and preserve them for their study and appreciation.

I have always felt the need to collect the world that surrounds me and reinterpret it, in a way. While my youth focused on making animals illustrations for nature books, I found in photography a faster and more faithful way to capture reality. Although I could have also chosen to express myself through poetry, sculpture or theatre, the photographic image provides me with the opportunity to freeze a moment and convey its vision in an impacful way.

My objective is to give importance and worth to rituals and traditions through photographs, capturing the essence of these ancient practices and sharing them with others. By doing this, it enables the appreciation, study and preservation of these cultural manifestations for future generations.

González Ximénez, Carlos, 'Masks, Masquerades and Rituals: Keeping Ancient Culture Alive', (interviewed by R. L. de Matas for *Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis*, 2.1, 15 June 2023, 130-167) **138** 



# Do you have any reason to choose traditional or ancient garments and spectacles?

First of all, traditional garments and costumes are part of ancient rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. These rituals are part of the folklore, and contain symbolic and profound cultural elements. By photographing these garments, you can capture the essence of these traditions and contribute to their preservation and dissemination.

In particular, masks are powerful symbols which represent supernatural and spiritual forces that are present in nature. These masks are used to connect with the divine and sacred, in rituals and ceremonies. Photographing these performances gives you the opportunity to explore the connection between the human and the transcendental, and to capture the energy and magic that surrounds these spectacles.

Also, photography allows you to interpret and document these spectacles in a unique way. Through my personal vision and ability to capture meaningful moments, I can showcase the beauty and depth of these ancient rituals and help highlight their importance to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of these cultural manifestations.

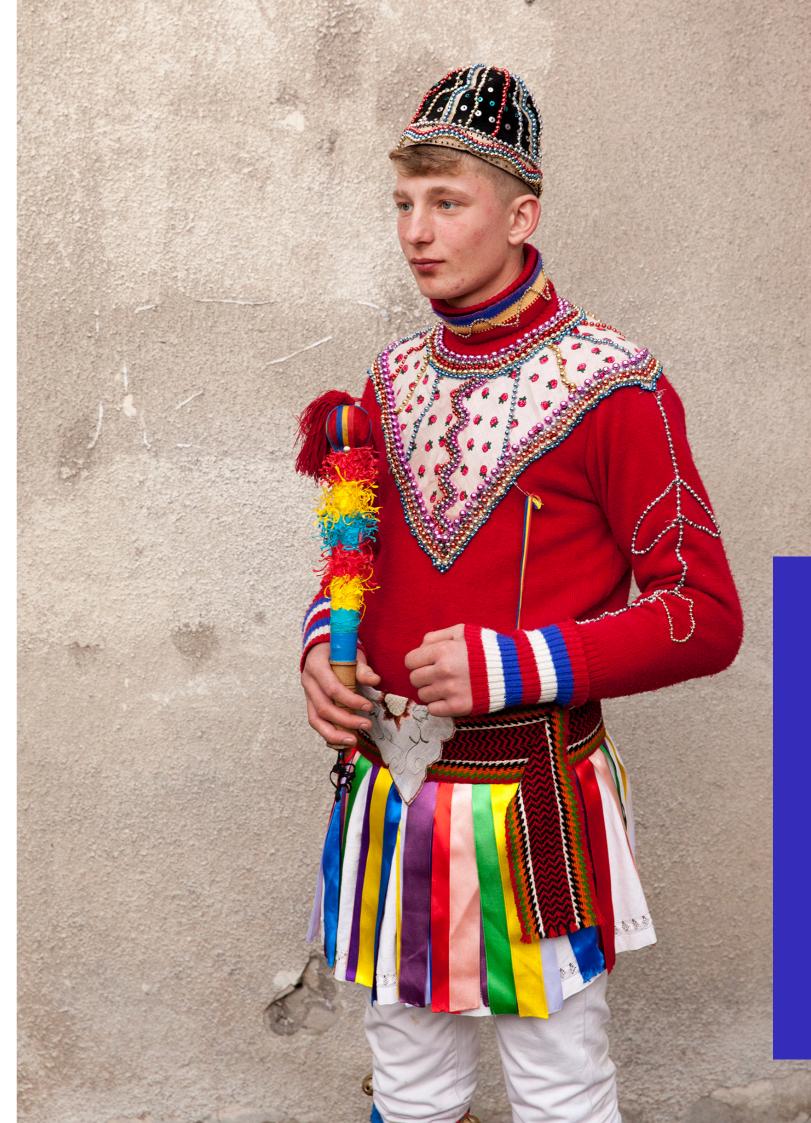
There are several reasons why I choose to photograph garments and traditional or ancient spectacles. The choice to photograph travels and traditional or ancient spectacles, is based upon the importance of preserving culture, appreciating aesthetic, connecting with humanity and exploring cultural diversity.

Human connection: traditional garments and ancient spectacles are usually deep rooted in the community, and have a profound significance for the people that use them. By photographing these events, I can capture the emotion, pride and human connection that is experienced in these celebrations. It is a way to share the history and experiences of people involved.

**Cultural exploration:** by delving into the world of garments and traditional spectacles, I have the opportunity to explore different cultures and better understand the richness and diversity of our world. Though photography, I can learn about the stories, beliefs and values that are transmitted though these traditions.

It is a way to honour and share the richness of our cultural heritage.

with humanity and exploring cultural diversity.
Cultural preservation: again, these garments and spectacles are part of the cultural heritage of a region or community. Photographing them helps preserve and document these traditions for future generations, providing a way to keep the memory of the roots and cultural identity alive.
Aesthetic value: traditional garments are frequently visually striking and unique. They have their own aesthetic, which reflects the history and beliefs of a community. By capturing these garments in pictures, I can highlight their beauty and convey the aesthetic richness of these traditions.
Human connection: traditional garments and ancient spectacles are usually deep rooted in the community, and have a profound significance for the people that use







## How would you describe the history behind these remarkable costumes?

Their history dates back to the ancient cultures that have passed on their traditions for generations. These garments and masks are not only ornamental clothing, but they are steeped in the profound cultural and symbolic meaning.

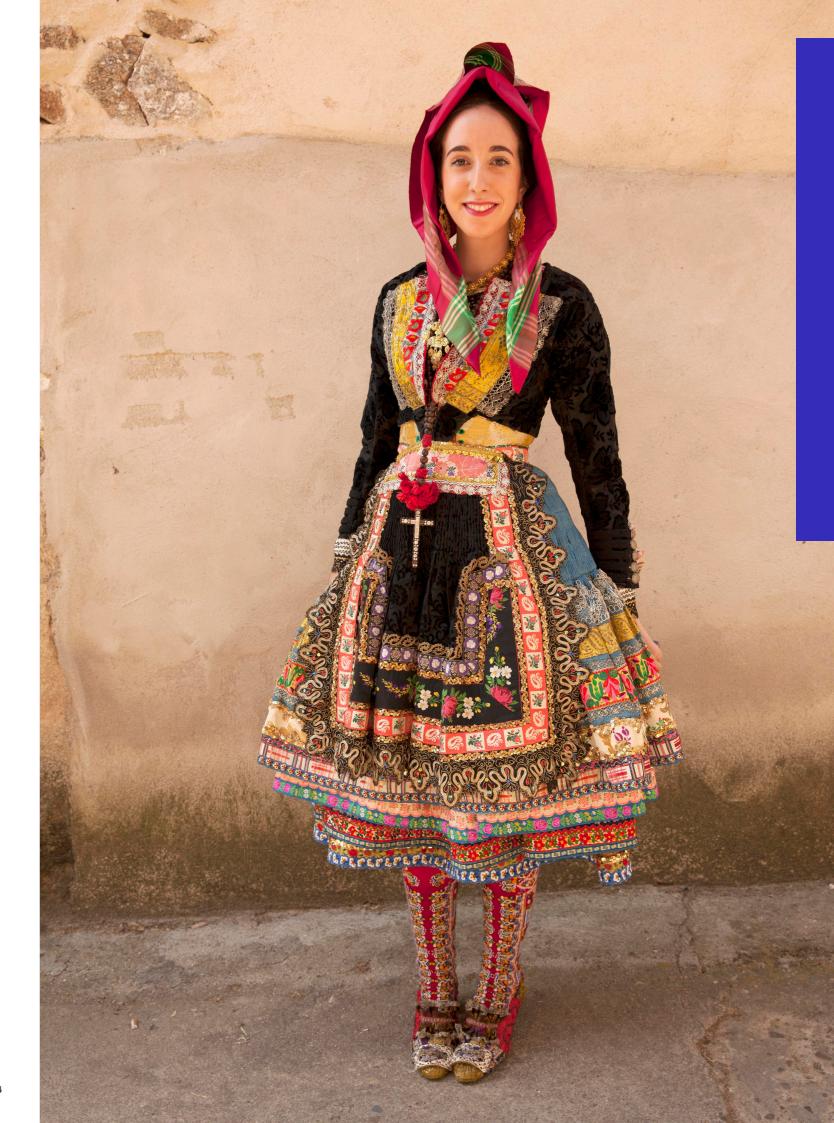
In many cultures, the use of masks and traditional garments is associated with rites of passage. These rituals mark an individual's transition to a new life stage, like reaching adulthood or the assumption of a new social role. Masks and garments are used to represent mythological or spiritual characters, and are an integral part of these rites of passage.

In addition, these costumes are full of magic and power. It is believed that masks have the ability to drive away bad spirits and protect whoever is wearing them. A power to invoke fertility and abundance is also attributed to them, since they are connected with the sacred bond between humans and nature.

Also, the history behind these striking costumes reflects the worldview and beliefs of the cultures from which they are created. They are artistic expressions and rituals that transcend aesthetic and are immersed in the spiritual and sacred. Ancient knowledge is transmitted through garments and masks, the sense of cultural identity is strengthened, and the connection with the divine is honoured.

In summary, the history behind these striking customs, encompasses rites of passage, magical beliefs and the symbolic power of fertility and protection. They are profound cultural manifestations that encapsulate the richness of the traditions that are transmitted from generation to generation.







## Which materials are used to create them, and how are they made? For example, by individuals or communally?



The materials that are used to make these garments and masks vary according to the traditions of the specific festivity. In general, both natural and complex elements for more elaborated designs are employed.

In the carnival festivities and winter celebrations, the use of domestic and wild animals fur is common, such as sheep, goats or foxes. These furs provide a distinctive texture and appearance to the attire, along with horns from animals such as deer, to add striking visual elements.

Vegetable materials, leaves, tree barks and crop remains from the fields and orchards are also used, which can be utilised to create the decorative elements of the masks, such as wreaths or ornaments.

The manufacturing of these garments and masks can be made by both individuals and communities, depending on the tradition and specific culture. In some cases, it is a skill transmitted from generation to generation, where each family or community has their own techniques and knowledge.

Is important to emphasise that the making of these traditional costumes requires a lot of imagination, craftsmanship and a strong desire to preserve ancient techniques. The materials that are used reflect the connection with the natural surroundings and ancient wisdom, looking to preserve the authenticity and essence of these unique cultural manifestations.







The atmosphere in rural communities is definitely different from the one that cities have. The pace of life is calmer, and there is close contact with nature. Silence is more tangible, only interrupted by animal sounds, the wind or water, thus creating a serene and peaceful atmosphere. In contrast with the constant bustle of the city, life in rural communities is imbued with a more intimate connection to the natural surroundings.

Can you tell me about the atmosphere of these rural communities? How does it compare both to city life and to other places?



Country life is based upon a closed dependence on nature's elements, domestic animals and agriculture. People of these communities usually have a direct relationship with the land and actively participate in agricultural and livestock activities, and life is marked by the seasons, natural cycles and work on the land.

Festivities have a community purpose in rural communities. These celebrations are moments of gathering and union for all the town's population, and are frequently rooted in local tradition, with a profound significance than to simply have fun and be entertained. They serve as opportunities to strengthen communal bonds, preserve costumes and honour cultural traditions.

By contrast, festivals in the city tend to aim more towards leisure and recreation. These celebrations may have a more individual or commercial approach, and entertainment and personal enjoyment are their main objective. Urban festivals are often disconnected from ancient traditions, and have a more contemporary and globalised nature.

It should be noted that the atmosphere and festivities can vary from place to place, both within cities and rural communities. Traditions, costumes and rituals can differ greatly from one region to another, reflecting the cultural diversity and local identity of each place.



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## Does your role go beyond photography?

As both an author and photographer, my job goes beyond photography, as it includes the objective of archiving ancient traditions. I firmly believe that it is of great value to document and preserve these traditions for future generations.

By gathering my reports and knowledge in a book form, I am actively contributing to filling and preserving these traditions. Books act as tangible registers that can transmit long term information, thus allowing others to dive into the fascinating world of these ancient cultural manifestations.

When books are shared, they become a powerful tool for disseminating and keeping alive the richness of these traditions over time. By providing detailed and visually attractive information, books help create a greater recognition and respect towards these cultural manifestations. I believe in the power of books as means to spread knowledge, sensitise people and preserve traditions for future generations.









## Are there any aspects in the representations and ancient costumes that particularly attract you?



The aspect that of representations and ancient costumes that I find particularly compelling is the transformation that occurs when a person wears a mask. This symbolic and psychological transformation is fascinating, as it allows the individual to be immersed in a different character and to experiment a kind of metamorphosis.

When someone wears a mask, they can break free from their everyday identity and dive into a certain degree of anonymity, allowing them to explore different personality aspects, release inhibitions and express emotions in a freer and more enigmatic way. Masks become a medium to hide the individual self and give way to a more archetypical and collective expression.

In addition, the transformation that occurs with the mask also has a powerful impact on spectators. By seeing someone with a mask, the mind goes into an unknown and mysterious territory. The mask becomes a portal that connects us with the sacred, spiritual and ancient world.

I am fascinated by how a simple work of art can have the power of altering our perception and taking us to a more profound and symbolic kingdom of the human experience.







Is there a connection between ritual, the community, the spiritual heritage and ancient traditions?



Yes, there is a profound connection between ritual, the community, the spiritual heritage and ancient traditions. These elements are intrinsically intertwined and reinforce each other throughout time.

Rituals have a key role in ancient traditions: they are ceremonial practices transmitted from generation to generation, and have a symbolic and spiritual meaning and can be related to agriculture, hunting, natural cycles, the passage of life or important events in the community. Through rituals, a link with the sacred is established, cultural identity is strengthened and community cohesion is promoted.

The community also plays a vital role in the preservation and transmission of ancient traditions. Traditions are shared and practiced by a group of people with a shared history, culture and common identity. The community then becomes the vehicle to keeping those traditions alive, passing them down through generations and preserving their authenticity.

Spiritual heritage is intertwined with ancient traditions as rituals and traditional practices often have a spiritual or religious dimension. The connection with the sacred, ancestors, and gods or forces of nature, are an integral part of this.

Throughout history, ancient traditions have faced external influences and have evolved in order to adapt to different periods and contexts. They may have been influenced by colonisations, dominant religions or political changes, but nevertheless, despite these influences ancient traditions have managed to survive and remain, thanks to a great community resilience and their ability to adapt without losing their essence.

The connection between ritual, the community, spiritual heritage and ancient traditions is an unbreakable chain.







# Do these rituals have a connection with other traditions?

Indeed, rituals and ancient traditions in the Iberian Peninsula have connections with other traditions because of the cultural influences and colonisations that have occurred throughout history. For centuries, different groups and cultures have left a mark in the region, merging with local traditions and enhancing the cultural repertoire of the peninsula.

One of the most outstanding influences come from the Celts, who inhabited the region for an extensive time period. The fusion of Celtic traditions with local cultures, like the Iberians and Romans, created a unique mix of rituals and practices.

The Romans arrival also had a significant impact on Iberian traditions. The Romans introduced their culture, religion and festivities, which were mixed with preexisting traditions. This cultural syncretism led to new manifestations and adaptations of ancient rituals.

Likewise, Germanic influences also left a mark on the Iberian Peninsula. Germans contributed with their own ritual practices and beliefs, which were again intertwined with local traditions, enriching them even more.

The arrival of Christianity also had an important impact in ancient traditions. In many cases, the Church tried to suppress or replace certain pagan rituals but, over time, many were assimilated and given a Christian meaning, such as Christmas festivities or celebrations of saints.

In summary, rituals and ancient traditions of the Iberian Peninsula are connected with other traditions, due to the cultural influences which have occurred throughout history. Celtic, Roman, Germanic and Christian influences are intertwined in a cultural diverse mosaic, in which certain unique elements and adaptations of ancient practices are appreciated. This interconnection enriches the cultural and spiritual heritage of the region.



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## Besides rituals, which other traditions do you find fascinating?



As for culture and traditions, I live in a privileged region, which has provided me with the opportunity to explore an ample variety of festivities and traditional practices. One of the traditions that fascinates me is the celebration for the Corpus Christi. During this festivity, streets are decorated with stunning flower carpets and vegetable decorations, creating beautiful designs and patterns. Regional attires also have a prominent role in these celebrations, with vibrant colours and elaborate details that reflect the cultural identity of each region.

I am also interested in equestrian traditions – some festivals feature the tradition of cutting a horse's man, which has a symbolic and important cultural meaning. These horse-related and equestrian practices are a reflection of the profound connection between the rural world and animals, and I find the process of witnessing and documenting these moments fascinating.

In addition, I find pagan traditions that still survive in some rural zones very compelling. These festivities are rooted in ancient beliefs and are usually related with natural cycles, like the summer solstice or spring equinox. They are magical moments in which rituals are carried out, paying tribute to nature and the elements.

Overall, I am attracted by the diversity of both pagan and Christian traditions that are found in a rural environment. Each festivity has its own allure and significance, and capturing and sharing the cultural richness that emanates from these traditions through my photographic work inspires me.

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instagram.com/ carlos.gonzalez.ximenez

## INTERVIEW LUTON CARNIVAL 2023: LEISURE FOR THE FAMILY

his year, 2023, marked the 47th year of the Luton International Carnival, which welcomed thousands of visitors from all walks of life. Luton's carnival artistic production is organised by the UK Centre for Carnival Arts (UKCCA). This year, it focused on providing an even more family-friendly environment that invites mothers, fathers, boys, and girls to engage in interactive activities. UKCCA's Executive Director, Claudette Whittingham, is keen to maintain a family atmosphere that is cohesive, inclusive, and reflects the community. Luton is ethnically diverse, and is considered one of the most diverse communities outside London.

Attending a carnival as a spectator/participant and absorbing the sights, sounds, and convivial atmosphere is a leisurely activity. It is true that carnival has an enticing atmosphere, but each carnival has its own unique qualities. Aside from this, carnival is also a brilliant way to interact with people from different parts of the world and get a sense of another culture. As highlighted by Devine and Anderson, 'recreation experiences have long been identified as contexts that bring people together through shared interests. Our leisure interests and experiences help us to see how we are more alike than different<sup>1</sup>.

In a time of escalating cost of living, which may put pressure on families to find cost-effective fun activities are increasing. The cost of living crisis might interfere with the enthusiasm and motivation to do things together as a family unit. The Luton carnival may provide a welcome opportunity for leisure time for families. A report published by Luton Borough Council suggests that 'Luton is currently ranked the 70th most deprived out of 317 local authorities'<sup>2</sup>. The report also indicates that, 'Luton has some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country' and the 'highest levels of homelessness'<sup>3</sup>. Prior to the lockdowns, the economy had grown, and Luton Airport had contributed to it. Unfortunately, the lockdowns severely impacted Luton's economy and 'unemployment rose well above the national rate<sup>44</sup>. Against this backdrop, Luton Carnival has created a space for family leisure. Festivals and carnivals offer an opportunity to experience family leisure

## By Dr R. L. de Matas

## Images © Dr Réa de Matas

<sup>1</sup> Devine, Mary Ann, Anderson, Lynn, Inclusive Leisure: A Strengths-Based Approach, (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2023), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, Eddie, Luton's Demography and Economy (Luton Borough Council, 2023) <https://www.luton.gov.uk/ Community\_and\_living/ Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/ observatory/jsna-this-is-Luton. pdf> laccessed 5 December 2023l (pp. 2, 24).

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, Eddie, Luton's Demography and Economy (Luton Borough Council, 2023) <https://www.luton.gov.uk/ Community\_and\_living/ Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/ observatory/jsna-this-is-Luton. pdf> laccessed 5 December 2023] (p. 2).

<sup>4</sup> Holmes, Eddie, Luton's Demography and Economy (Luton Borough Council, 2023) <https://www.luton.gov.uk/ Community\_and\_living/ Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/ observatory/jsna-this-is-Luton. pdf> laccessed 5 December 2023] (p. 3).



















for free. In addition, it is not uncommon for some families to bring their own food and snacks to carnivals or festivals. This allows families to have fun while keeping costs at a minimum. According to Jepson and Stadler, 'attending festivals as a family can foster bonding, belonging, happiness, and has the potential to enhance the family's quality-of-life (QOL) over time'5. Luton Carnival welcomes all and creates an ideal opportunity for bonding - not just within families, but also with friends or people who originate from the same country and meet at the carnival. At this year's carnival, there were evident fun family moments at different locations along the carnival route. These were well thought out and encouraged families to get involved. Some activities invited families to participate in storytelling or dancing, as well as interacting with masqueraders.

The following is a brief interview with UKCCA's Executive Director, Claudette Whittingham. She explains her vision for Luton.

## 1. Can you tell us a little bit about your role in Luton Carnival?

I am the Executive Director. I work with a team to organise the delivery of Luton Carnival. We are very privileged to have an Executive Producer, Steve Pascal, overseeing the day-to-day delivery of the event. He has extensive experience of working in the carnival industry, which includes being the former CEO of London's Notting Hill Carnival. Pascal, as he is known, is key to ensuring Luton Carnival is delivered efficiently and effectively.

## 2. In what ways does Luton Carnival appeal to you?

As a mother, I recall the challenge of trying to find a safe space that generates mass happiness for children to enjoy. Luton Carnival appeals because it is that safe space where the creative content is both exceptional and enjoyable, spreading happiness across the masses.

## 3. Would you mind telling us a little about what makes Luton's carnival unique?

Luton Carnival is a very distinct brand in the UK carnival and creative industry. It is a family-friendly, child-focused event. This means the creative output appeals to all, but particularly children. This means that parents and carers in particular know this is a safe space for all. Luton Carnival is focused on children - their engagement and involvement in the carnival arts. This unique selling point is complemented by the fact Luton Carnival celebrates carnival traditions and heritage world-wide. This comes courtesy of the wide, diverse range of communities that participate in the event. We are privileged to have groups from - just to name a few - India, Hungary, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ghana, Nigeria, Somalia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, St Kitts, Trinidad, Ireland, Jamaica, Afghanistan, Brazil, and Guyana, as well as Roma participants. However, we're also honoured to have participants who have physical and sensory disabilities and needs joining us: we have elders, nursery groups and primary schools, college and university students who are part of the event. We're even joined by a carnival band made up of

<sup>5</sup> Stadler, Raphaela, Jepson, Allan, 'Understanding Feelings, Barriers, and Conflicts in Festivals and Events; the Impact upon Family QOL', in The Routledge Handbook of Festivals, ed. by Judith Mair, 1st edn (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 235-243 (p. 1).

Luton Borough Council's Chief Executive, elected councillors, and other Luton Council staff. We're supported by the Luton Town Football Club, both the main club and their community trust. Their representatives join us on carnival day. In addition to providing financial support, our sponsors come and participate in the event, not as VIPs, but as part of the general community, which makes the event special. We also welcome artists from carnivals across the UK. In 2023, this included steel bands from London (UFO and Steel Pan in Motion), puppets from Manchester (Global Grooves), mokojumbies from the North-East of England (Alan Vaughan), and costume bands from Leeds, Nottingham, Leicester, London Notting Hill Carnival, Milton Keynes, Hull, and the Isle of Wight. We have also had international guests join our event from various countries, including Germany, Trinidad, Brazil, and Ghana. These are just a few aspects of the spirit of inclusion that makes Luton Carnival truly unique, inviting, and welcoming.

## 4. What are your plans for the growth and development of the carnival?

We plan to build on our spirit of inclusion, and moving towards green sustainability will be key to our inclusion ethos. We will no longer have diesel- or petrol-fuelled vehicles, generators, and sound systems as part of the event. We will be using green energy sources to animate our carnival parade. We will also revert to the use of biodegradable materials for costume-making, encouraging the reuse and remaking of existing costumes to ensure sustainability. It's important that, as carnival respects heritage, it also respects the home of that heritage – Planet Earth.

We will continue to extend our creative offer outside what could be regarded as the traditional setting – the carnival parade. We have demonstrated we can carnivalise (yes, it is a word) anything! We have set up exhibitions, added carnival to film and event launches, been part of conferences, moved into fashion, and so much more. Our plan is to ensure that, in every sphere of life, we share a touch of carnival that generates opportunities, facilitates social and economic regeneration, and most importantly puts smiles on the faces of all who have the privilege of being connected with our art form.

We will also focus on carnival futurism, which is both about the development of young folk to take forward our heritage, skills, and practices, and also includes making use of new technologies to ensure that carnival remains relevant in a fast-changing world. COVID-19 made us recognise that technology, like streaming, meant folk who were not present in person on the streets could still be included as part of our carnival parade. This same technology could mean folk who, for all sorts of reasons – such as advanced age, illness, or sensory sensitivities – cannot join us in person can still be part of our carnival family via digital engagement. We want to explore the other benefits that technology can provide, and these are probably best harnessed by listening to the voices of the younger generations, learning and often being directed by them. As we pass the carnival traditions forward, it is clear that the young generation has so much to offer, and this means the world's greatest creative genre will continue to thrive.























## 5. In carnival, especially at Luton Carnival, what is the role of family?

We're very pleased that our interpretation of family is not just about what is often regarded as the modern family model. Luton displays very traditional and welcoming extended family models, so we have many generations of families included in the event. We have communities coming together as 'families': community organisations supporting the engagement of their members, and guests participating in the carnival mas' camps or pan band rehearsals, where they are supported by more experienced folk, who are the equivalent of family elders, to ensure they are ready for the event. During these mas' camp sessions, alongside the support, they are fed and watered - cared for, as they are part of the carnival family. These 'soft care' elements are of increasing significance during the cost of living crisis we currently face - the meal we deliver could be the only meal a child or adult enjoys that day.

We have school 'families', where teachers work with their pupils, volunteers, assistants, and others to get prepared [for] and then participate in the carnival event. We are also joined by members of our wider UK carnival family, coming to join our event and make it spectacular.

We have the #TeamLuton family, where UKCCA works in partnership with a wide range of organisations to ensure the event is delivered for the benefit of residents and guests to Luton. The 2023 #TeamLuton family included the Luton Association of Mas' Bands, Luton Borough Council, the University of Bedfordshire, the Culture Trust, The Mall, Active Luton, the Luton Community Police Team, and the Luton Irish Forum, all organisations that provided services and support to ensure Luton Carnival was delivered well. It was also fantastic that senior representatives of our partners participated in the launch of the carnival parade, with some like Luton Council's Chief Executive chipping the full parade in carnival costume.

We also have a family of funders and sponsors. In 2023, this ensured that, at a time when schools were being challenged financially and might have struggled to be part of the carnival, the sponsors stepped in and provided the required financial and in-kind resources. This family of funders and sponsors were the Luton Rising Luton Town Football Club Community Trust, Luton Town Football Club, Luton BID, TUI, Taylor Wimpey, Valicity Care Services, Tesco, Gentian Events, BT Events, the Arts Council of England, the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation, Luton Council, and the Royal Opera House Bridge. This could be regarded as an unusual view of what is considered a family; however, all families need financial resources to survive and thrive. Family is core to Luton Carnival's success. It turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, ensuring the event is an inclusive and welcoming safe space.

## 6. In your opinion, what were the highlights of this year's carnival?

There were so many highlights of this year's event. It was delightful to be joined by six primary schools showing off the costumes the pupils had created. This aligns perfectly with our brand, which focuses on families and young people. We were joined by a large Eastern European group, which included a number of Ukrainian refugees. This Eastern European group put their traditions on show, which included the use of flowers and other natural items and created a beautiful exhibition, much of which was paraded by children. We enjoyed the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Windrush Generation's arrival in the UK. Our lead carnival band, Scandalous Mas' Band, a youth band, created large and small Windrush ship costumes and performed these throughout the carnival parade. We also welcomed green costumes created by artists in Pakistan in partnership with Alif New Beginnings, a Muslim group that celebrated Islamic carnival traditions. The art created was used to create mini floats by dressing mobility scooters, ensuring those with physical disabilities could be part of the parade.

We also enjoyed various traditional customs and garments complemented by carnival costumes, all accompanied by traditional music joining the parade. At the performance area, the crowd was privileged to witness spectacular performances. It is fair to say the entire parade from start to finish was a real enjoyable spectacle, as evidenced by the audience's joyous reactions.

In addition, [and] in partnership with The Culture Trust, we included some new features such as the free storytelling zones, where folk had the opportunity to enjoy some of the tales of Anansi - a character well known in many cultures. We even had an early session for young people with special educational needs, ensuring they could avoid the main crowds of the day, which could have caused them some anxiety. The feedback from these sessions was 100% positive, so it's a feature we will bring back and extend to share the stories, and the understanding, of more communities.

Carnival is all about telling the stories of cultures world-wide. That was done in a fabulous way at Luton Carnival 2023. It was also clear to see that, while the differences of cultures were on show, it was beautiful to see the many things that communities have in common - the things that bring us all together. All those groups came together to create a joyous carnival parade - all of we together as one!

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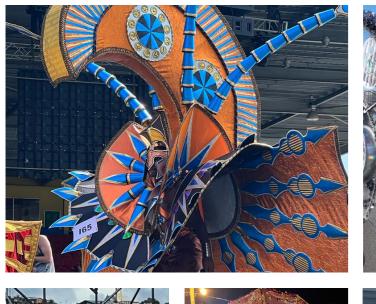
By Rhonda Allen

Image © Catherine Sforza Moko Somokow at the Starlift Panyard 

## **Review of Carnival 2023: A Reflective Perspective**

## **Rhonda Allen**

Former Director of the Sheffield Carnival and international Carnival judge













Carnival with all its grandeur and beauty in order to live (remember it cannot die) must be transported (legally and otherwise) to all corners of the globe. Therefore, Carnival has become an international festival and an international discourse - a discourse that is opening and conquering new people, new cultures, new horizons and new societies" (Grant 2004)

In this article I explore my visits to various carnivals, both in the UK and internationally, where I have been involved as an observer/participant, masquerader and costume judge. My 2023 carnival tour began with a sense of nostalgia that I always encounter when returning home to my native Trinidad and Tobago, with this year's carnival having been dubbed the "mother of all carnivals". I looked forward to hearing the latest calypsoes, soca music, steelband performances, 'jouvert', the carnival fetes, and marvelling at the creative costume designs, updated for 2023.

## Trinidad and Tobago: The Music

'So soca must live and never die' Olatunji (Soca song 2023 Engine Room)

Calypso music is a vibrant, controversial, and socially captivating genre that is deeply rooted in my own culture. Calypso music originated in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), and therefore holds a significant place in the country's history and identity. Mason (1998) states, "calypso can be party music taken to its limits and it can be biting social satire, or anything in between, but it is born and bred in Trinidad, and the people love it for that..... Calypso lives and breathes carnival" (1998: 9).

In this section, I will share my views on the soca music that I heard throughout my carnival tour - the music this year was especially palatable and engaging, and it was a pleasant surprise to see a departure from wine, jam, and women's body parts being the subject matter of the musical hook. It demonstrated the vibrancy of soca music, which was widely regarded to have been created in Trinidad and Tobago by the late Ras Shorty I, who experimented with a fusion of soul, reggae, chutney, and African and Latin musical styles.

The rhythmic energy of soca music is uplifting and infectious - the lively beats and catchy melodies always put me in a good mood and encourage me to dance. Love, celebration, and cultural pride are common themes in the lyrics, which add an extra layer of positivity to the genre. Among the soca songs I heard this year were 'Shelter' by Bunji Garlin, 'Hard Fete' by Bunji Garlin, 'The Spirit Calling Me' by Machel Montano, 'Shelter' by Bunji Garlin, 'Hard Fete' by Bunji Garlin, 'The Spirit Calling Me' by Machel Montano, 'Like Yourself' by Machel Montano and Patrice Roberts and 'Bless the Fete' by Patrice Roberts.

## Panorama

In my opinion, the Panorama Steelband competition is an exhilarating and vibrant showcase of talent and cultural heritage. This annual event brings together steel bands from across Trinidad and Tobago to compete for the coveted title of Panorama Champion.

The visit to the pan yards, listening to the steel bands rehearse for the panorama competition, is an experience like no other. Interestingly, steelpan aficionado Dr Kim Johnson notes that this situation is unique in that listening to the steel bands rehearse in their pan yards leading up to the event is generally not permitted in any other musical competition.

"You can only experience the power and glory of the steelpan in TT. You can only hear a full 120-member band here. I will go further, to say to fully experience pan, you have to be able to go in a panyard and hear them when they practise. That camaraderie, that vibe, that experience, is unique. When you go, you are integrated into the band" (Johnson 2021).

The competition serves as a platform for these talented musicians to demonstrate their skill, creativity, and musical prowess. Each Steelband meticulously prepares their arrangement, blending traditional calypso and soca rhythms with contemporary elements to create a unique sound that captivates audiences. Not only does the Panorama Steelband competition provide entertainment for spectators, but it also

**Trinidad images** © Rhonda Allen

plays a significant role in preserving and promoting our culture. The performances are infused with rich cultural traditions, showcasing the history and spirit of carnival through the sound of the steel band.

The rivalry amongst the steel bands is invigorating as pan players find enthusiasm in displaying their versatility in playing the various pans. The steel band is made up of the Frontline Pans (the tenor, double tenor, and double seconds pans); the Mid-Range (the guadraphonic, cello and guitar pans); the Background (tenor bass, plus six bass and between seven to nine bass pans) and the Engine Room (the percussion and rhythm section).The Panorama finals are held at the Queens Park Savannah in the capital of Trinidad, Port-Of-Spain. Personally, I do not go into the paying stands to listen to the final night performances - I prefer to stand on the 'drag', which is a paved area leading to the Queen's Park Savannah Carnival Stage. It is a popular spot for carnival activities, such as masquerade bands, calypso tents, and steelpan competitions, but is also known for its street food vendors, who sell local delicacies such as doubles, corn soup, chicken and chips and roti. Listening to steel bands rehearse before going onto the stage evokes a real feeling of nostalgia because, as a child, my mother would take my siblings and I to Skinner Park, where the finals of the panorama were held in the 1970s. I remember the crowds, excitement, the dust rising from people jumping, shoving and pushing, the pans, the feeling of holding on tightly to my mother's hand, the smell of oranges, rum, guava flavour from the snow cone and the smells of so many different kinds of food. Those memories have stayed with me, and reliving them as an adult transports me back to those fond childhood moments that I can somewhat replicate while standing and looking on from on the 'drag'. The pan supporters push the pans along with the pan players, I listen to the steelbands rehearse their tune of choice before going onto the Savannah Stage to be judged, I watch the crowds of supporters converge to support, critic and discuss the pan arrangement and who will win the panorama this year.

The Panorama Steelband competition fosters a sense of community among participants and supporters. It brings people together in celebration of music, artistry, and unity. Overall, I believe that the Panorama Steelband competition is an essential part of our culture. It celebrates musical excellence while preserving traditions and fostering a sense of identity within local communities.

All those involved in the many Steelband orchestras truly deserve to be congratulated, and I hope they know that their involvement and commitment are recognised and appreciated. I sincerely thank them for taking me along on this musical journey, as I am never disappointed.

## My Perspective on Carnival Costumes, as a Judge

## **Kiddies Carnival**

The event that brings me so much joy and hope for the future is the 'Kiddies Carnival'. The effort, creativity and innovation of the designers, parents and young people is evident, as they put on a spectacle of colour, beauty and innocence in the costumes, 'playing mas' with such admiration and glee. I have the utmost respect for costume designers who create amazing, colourful and avant-garde designs for the children's bands, such as Rosalind Gabriel, Zebaquik Productions (Allen Brothers), Lilliput Theatre, but also the schools, community groups, parents, teachers and young people that also design their own costumes. A large number of the children's troupes perform in serpentine formation which is, in my opinion, a fantastic choice for group performances, as it not only showcases the beauty of this art form, but also highlights the power of collaboration and unity among dancers. The serpentine dance involves a series of sinuous and graceful movements, mimicking the motions of a snake, and the fluid, synchronised movements of the participants create an enchanting visual spectacle that captivates audiences. The dancers create intricate patterns and formations that add depth and complexity to the performance. Group performances also offer more space for creativity and coordination among masqueraders, incorporating different levels, formations and transitions to enhance the overall impact of the dance, while also creating a sense of unity among the participants as they work together to bring their vision to life. This sense of camaraderie helps the dancers learn to trust each other's movements, timing and cues, creating a visually stunning performance.

In my opinion, costumes play a significant role in making the carnival experience enjoyable and memorable for children. Carnival is a time of celebration and excitement, and dressing up in vibrant costumes adds to the festive spirit. Children love to transform into their favourite characters—whether that be superheroes, princesses, animals, or mythical creatures—as costumes allow them to immerse themselves in their imagination, and bring their dreams to life. Not only do these costumes spark creativity and imagination, but they also promote social interaction – indeed, when children see each other dressed up in different costumes, it becomes a fun conversation starter and encourages them to engage with one another. Moreover, wearing carnival costumes can boost a child's selfconfidence as, by embodying a character that they admire or aspire to be like, children feel empowered and more willing to express themselves freely during the festivities.

A large amount of careful consideration goes into the designing of age-appropriate and comfortable costumes for children that ensure both their safety and enjoyment during carnival celebrations. Parents should take into account factors such as size, fabric quality, ease of movement and any potential allergy concerns when selecting the perfect costume for their child. As long as these issues are addressed, children's carnival costumes add an extra layer of magic and joy to this special occasion, and allow them to fully embrace the spirit of celebration while unleashing their creativity and imagination.

## King and Queen Costumes

Carnival costumes are an integral part of the vibrant and joyous celebrations that take place during carnival season, adding a special touch of excitement and creativity to the festivities. Carnival costumes allow individuals to express their unique personalities and immerse themselves in the spirit of the event – they come in all shapes, sizes and themes, from traditional cultural attire to fantastical creations inspired by mythology or popular culture.

The attention to detail and craftsmanship that goes into creating carnival costumes is to be admired, whether it be hand-sewn embellishments, intricate beadwork or elaborate headpieces, these costumes showcase the skill and dedication of their creators. Moreover, wearing a carnival costume can be a transformative experience. It allows both the wearer and spectators to temporarily step out of their everyday lives and embody a different persona or character, while encouraging self-expression, fostering a sense of belonging within a community and creating unforgettable memories. Carnival costumes are not just outfits: they are an embodiment of celebration, creativity and cultural heritage that bring joy to participants and spectators alike, adding an extra layer of magic to the carnival experience.

When attending Carnival the Queens Park Savannah in Port-of Spain, Trinidad, I walked along the track as designers were putting their costumes together to perform before the judges. I was pleased with their use of local materials, steering away from the often overbearing, over-used feathers and beads that are common in many carnivals of this nature. In fact, some costumes did not use feathers at all, and it is refreshing to see designers utilising different, innovative materials while still maintaining the striking width and height that carnival costumes are traditionally known for. Some designers even implemented Pyrotechnics and engineering - the King and Queen costumes were particularly impressive, with much time and effort clearly having gone into such majestic, masterpieces of visual art that glide, turn, spin and rotate across the Savannah stage, while the traditional 'Moko jumbies' evoked a sense of nostalgia, walking tall and proud on their stilts. The history of the Moko Jumbies is particularly interesting, with Coomansing (2019) noting: "traditional part of Caribbean culture, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. They are stilt walkers or dancers who wear colourful garb and carnival masks. The face of a Moko Jumbie is usually completely covered, obscuring their human identity, even if they do not wear a decorative mask. The name "Moko" means healer in Central Africa, while "jumbi" is a West Indian term for a ghost or spirit that may have been derived from the Kongo language word zumbi. The Moko Jumbies are thought to originate from West African tradition brought to the Caribbean......In Trinidad and Tobago, the Moko Jumbie is considered a god who watches over his village and is able to foresee danger and evil due to his towering height. The Moko Jumbie would be represented by men on towering stilts and perform acts that were unexplainable to the human eye" (Coomansing 2019).

## Jouvert

Jouvert is a pre-dawn street party that marks the start of Carnival festivities, and is a vibrant and exhilarating celebration that takes place annually in Trinidad and Tobago, widely regarded as one of the most exciting and unique cultural experiences in the world. The energy and enthusiasm displayed by participants during this event is truly infectious, as the streets come alive with music and dancing, with many participants wearing costumes or even painting their bodies with mud, oil and brightly coloured paints.

Jouvert is historical significance is particularly fascinating, having originated from the emancipation celebrations of enslaved Africans, who would gather before dawn to express their freedom through music and dance. This rich history adds an extra layer of depth to the event, and attending Jouvert allows you to immerse yourself in the local culture and witness firsthand the pride that Trinidadians have for their heritage. It's an opportunity to let go of inhibitions, embrace spontaneity, and join a joyous celebration like no other.

It is, however, important to note that Jouvert can also be quite an intense and overwhelming experience for some individuals due to its energetic nature. Though it may not be to everyone's taste, it offers a unique blend of history, culture, excitement and community spirit for adventurous spirits, filled with music, dancing, and cultural immersion.

Too excited to sleep the night before, on the day of Jouvert I woke up at 4 am to get ready with my family. The experience for me is very much a family-oriented one, as not only

do I spend general quality time with my adult children, my sister and my son-in-law, but we also perform in a band together as part of the Jouvert celebrations. We all got into our Jouvert outfits—ensuring we had our sunscreen, mug, rucksack sunglasses and, of course, positive energy—before arriving at D'Image People Jouvert camp, where we have been loyal members of the band for over 10 years. Breakfast consisted of a mouthwatering array of 'Trini' breakfast delicacies such as 'doubles', bake and chow mein, bake and cheese, bake and saltfish, aloo (potato) pie, corn soup, coffee, tea and orange juice. WegatheredtogetherastheDJtruckarrived, prayed and headed off on the route to the judging point, listening to the various soca sounds and the lyrics of Patrice Roberts' 'Bless the Fete'.

## Parade Of The Bands: Adult Mas on the Streets

The Parade of the Carnival Bands in Trinidad is a vibrant and lively event that showcases the rich cultural heritage of the country and is, in my opinion, a spectacle that should not be missed. Trinidad's Carnival is renowned worldwide for its extravagant costumes, infectious music and captivating performances, with the parade bringing together bands that each represent a unique theme or concept. From traditional masquerade characters to modern interpretations, the creativity displayed by these bands is truly awe-inspiring – in particular, I enjoyed seeing the traditional Red Indian Mas and Fancy Sailors, accompanied by the steel bands that keep the community spirit alive as they chipped along the road.

Attending the Parade Of The Carnival Bands in Trinidad allows visitors to immerse themselves in the festive atmosphere and experience the energy and enthusiasm of both participants and spectators firsthand. The vibrant colours, rhythmic music, and infectious dancing create an electrifying ambiance that resonates throughout the streets. Moreover, this event offers an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate Trinidadian culture, providing insights into local traditions, folklore and history through artistic expression, street theatre, and the elaborate, intricate costumes that often convey powerful messages or narratives.

Whether a visitor or a local resident, the Parade Of The Carnival Bands offers an unforgettable experience that celebrates diversity, unity, creativity, joy and synergy. A catharsis experience like no other, attendees can truly feel the Spirit of Carnival really call to them.

In conclusion, I believe that attending all the carnival events that are on offer—the calypso tents, fetes, the children's Parade Of Bands, King and Queen of The Bands, Panorama Finals Steelband finals, Jouvert and the Parade of the Carnival Bands—is an absolute must for anyone wanting to immerse themselves in this enchanting cultural extravaganza.

## United Kingdom

## Luton Carnival

The weather was kind to Luton carnival as the sun shone, allowing the masqueraders and the audience to make the most of the day. I was fortunate enough to have walked along the carnival route to take pictures of the various troupes, with participants having travelled from all around the UK. It was particularly good to see such inclusivity at the event, with so many different communities and faiths involved in the carnival parade, including performances from Ghanaian, Nigerian, South Asian and Ukrainian dancers. The Moko Jumbies performed on stilts in their colourful and flowing costumes, while children masqueraders of all ages and ethnicities danced to the childfriendly soca music being played from the groups taking part in the parade. Though some DJs played more modern soca music, it was the old soca songs that seemed to be the order of the day – though it is always good to hear the classics, I personally believe that it's incredibly important to champion new artists too. The atmosphere was electric – the weather was sunny and hot, the crowds were bustling, the smell of Caribbean food hung in the air while people queued to purchase food and greeted their friends as a steel band played.

## Barking and Dagenham

I attended Barking and Dagenham Carnival on July 8, 2023, though this time I was looking through the lens of an assessor. This was a new experience, as I had to take in every aspect of the event in much more detail than usual, in order to present a report after the event. It was important to note both the elements that I liked and also those that could be developed, in order to assist festival organisers in creating a fresh, new carnival experience that still maintains a traditional element of carnival, such as using steelband, mas' and soca music and focusing on youth involvement.

Though there were intermittent rain showers occurred throughout the day's activities, they did not dampen the spirit of participants and spectators. This was also in part a result of the event's musical performances, which were hugely uplifting and kept the carnival vibe, engagement and energy alive. Drum Works' opening performance was very energetic, setting the carnival tone for the day, with the young people playing in the band performing with great enthusiasm.

In addition, there were performances from two youth steel orchestras—including Kingsdale Foundation School, who won the Steelband School-O-Rama competition—playing popular songs that had the audience dancing and singing along. The IROKO African Drumming gave a rhythmic and spirited performance by male and female drummers, dressed in brightly coloured green African attire. Some of the female drummers were also dancing, and encouraged participation from the audience – indeed, some joined in and seemed to enjoy themselves!

An Afro-Portuguese Community, Capoeira & Batuque, provided a fantastic performance, representing the Brazilian Community with the use of sticks and choreographed dancing and drumming. Resident DJs then entertained the audience with uplifting soca music from the past and present, supported by various musical accompaniments, and the sound system was of good quality, evidenced by the clear sound through heavy rain showers.

The vibrancy and energy of the event superseded the damp conditions, with its masqueraders, adorned in colourful costumes and dancing to infectious rhythms, creating an atmosphere that is truly captivating. The presence of traditional characters such as the Moko Jumbies dancing on their stilts, and the performance by soca artist Trini Juice, had the audience participating in the celebrations, with even the mayoress joining in. In addition to the music and dance, attendees could enjoy food stalls serving various Caribbean dishes such as saltfish fritters, rice and peas, mac and cheese, coleslaw, jerk chicken and fried chicken, as well as craft stalls and the opportunity to take a picture wearing a carnival headpiece.

Having rehearsed for months leading up to the carnival, the performances showcased diverse cultures, ages and genders, with masqueraders old and young having travelled from across the world. It was, however, the international performers from Trinidad and Tobago such as the 'Dame Lorrianes' that brought the carnival to a resounding and unforgettable carnival finish, with a culmination of all the costumes and masqueraders.

## Nothing Hill Carnival

The Notting Hill Carnival, held annually in London, is known for its vibrant atmosphere and diverse cultural displays. There are many positives aspects of Nothing Hill carnival, and I truly hope that the media will highlight the positive elements of this uplifting event. Often, the media presents a massive bias, focussing on the presence of drugs, theft, crime, drunkenness and reckless behaviour that can be present at most large events, result in the carnival being perceived as dangerous and unsafe to attend. I strongly believe that we must work together to commend our young people for their involvement in positive activities, and not let the reckless and risky behaviour of a small minority spoil the effort and commitment of others. In this section, I would like to share my personal experience and offer my opinion on steelband competitions. Having attended several over the years, I have come to appreciate the unique artistry and cultural significance that these events bring. On my first night in Nothing Hill festivities, I attended some of the rehearsals, and it was so uplifting to see so many young people of different ethnicities and background practising their pan playing with such enthusiasm, concentration, commitment and discipline, which must be recognised, appreciated and praised.

I attended the Panorama Steelband Finals on August 26, 2023, and which was an exhilarating and joyful experience. The bad weather did not dampen the spirits of those in attendance, with the musical arrangements from the young pannists put the audience in a trance, as they were taken on a captivating musical journey.

Steelband competitions showcase the talent and skill of musicians who masterfully play instruments made from discarded oil drums. The rhythmic melodies produced by these ensembles create a lively and infectious atmosphere that captivates both participants and spectators alike. In my opinion, steelband competitions not only celebrate the rich musical heritage of Caribbean culture, but also serve as a platform for fostering camaraderie among participants. The dedication, discipline and teamwork required to deliver a flawless performance in these competitions is truly commendable.

Furthermore, steelband competitions also provide an opportunity for talented musicians to gain recognition on a larger scale. Winning or placing in such prestigious events can open doors to professional opportunities and help propel their careers within the music industry. These events not only showcase incredible musical talent but also foster a sense of community and pride in cultural traditions.

The carnival continued on August 26-28, where, this time, I was involved in a professional capacity as Head Judge for Nothing Hill Carnival. I enjoyed working alongside my fellow judges and adjudicator, DJ Martin Jay, the staff, members of the Nothing Hill Trust and so many more interesting people who made the experience unforgettable. I watched the children's bands, 'Dutty Mas', T-shirts, costumed bands, Samba and Brazilian bands and steel pan performers on both days. The costumes in particular were to be commended,

as the designers' thorough research, creativity, artistry and innovation was evident, and had a huge impact on the overall experience. It was a privilege to witness such incredible craftsmanship – from intricate beadwork to elaborate headdresses, every detail was meticulously designed and executed, and it was fascinating to see how each costume represented different themes and cultural influences through the breaktakingly beautiful colours and patterns used.

Being part of the judging panel allowed me to appreciate the participants' hard work and dedication even more so than I would have as a spectator, and it is so wonderful to preservation of cultural heritage through these stunning costumes. It was evident that countless hours of planning, sewing and crafting went into creating these masterpieces, and interacting with the participants further enhanced my experience. Their enthusiasm and pride was infectious as they shared stories behind their designs, making for a joyous celebration of culture, diversity and artistic expression. My experience as a judge at Notting Hill Carnival emphasised how important it is to embrace different cultures and showcase creativity on such grand platforms. I am grateful to have been part of this incredible event that truly captures London's multicultural spirit. Unfortunately, the carnival judging experience left much to be desired due to a lack of innovation and design in costumes. I felt that many were somewhat boring and unimaginative, failing to capture the excitement and vibrancy that is typically associated with carnival celebrations. Throughout the judging process, I couldn't help but feel disappointed by the lack of creativity displayed in some of the costumes. Many seemed to be repetitive and lacked originality, making it slightly more difficult to appreciate the huge amount of effort put into their creation. It appeared as though there was a missed opportunity to push boundaries and truly showcase the artistry that goes into designing carnival costumes.

In conclusion, my experience with carnival costume judging highlighted a need for more innovative and imaginative designs. By injecting fresh ideas and pushing creative boundaries, future events can reignite excitement and captivate audiences, resulting in a more memorable celebration.

At times, I feel a juxtaposition in terms of costume and design as I have been bombarded with feathers being used to project every theme under the sun, I feel like there is a need to stop and reset, go back to previous designers and learn the basics of the art, creativity and designing a costume that has depth and imagination. This has been an interesting and hectic carnival experience, where I have been lucky enough to see carnival through the eyes of a spectator, masquerader and a costume judge, and I look forward to the events I will attend and review in the future.



## The Netherlands: Rotterdam Carnival

My first visit to Rotterdam Carnival was an exciting and invigorating experience, that truly exceeded expectations, with a standout aspect being the energetic live stage performances. I walked around and listened to music from the 'Dutch Caribbean', Zouk and soca music, sampling different foods and enjoying the atmosphere – I particularly enjoyed the delicious 'bari', which is a fried, seasoned dough served with a tomato and spicy tamarind sauce, and is a speciality from Surinam.

The parade of costumed bands, which took place on the Saturday of the event, consisted of approximately 25 participants. They came through an orderly fashion, accompanied by live DJs and steel bands on the trucks adorned in colourful, creative, innovative and beautiful costumes. Similarly to my experience at the Trinidad carnival, it was refreshing to see designers stepping away from the norm and not simply relying on beads and feathers for their costumes. Instead, their intricate attire reflected themes ranging from historical events to folklore or simply artistic expression, adding an element of visual splendour to the festivities. There were many striking headpieces with intricate use of fabric, plastic-moulded craft, cardboard, materials, papier mâché, wire bending craftsmanship, hats and wigs.

One cannot overlook the immense community spirit that permeated the Rotterdam Caribbean carnival. Participants come together as one big family – united by a love for their heritage and the desire to celebrate it with others. This sense of camaraderie creates an atmosphere that fosters inclusivity and ensures that everyone feels welcome.

However, one could not attend an event without any element of controversy. The organisers of the event did not want masqueraders 'twerking' or dancing in a sensual manner, so two bands displayed a protest when passing the VIP seats and mayoral balcony. The first opted to turn their music off, expressing their frustration at the organisers' attempts to control the carnival, claiming that they had been taken back to an era 400 years ago. Another played Machel Montano and Patrice Roberts' song "Like Yurself', which contains lyrics that mirrored their discourse with the organisers.











**Rotterdam images** © Rhonda Allen



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By Prof Ana Arán Sanchez

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## Mólema: A Death-Celebration-End Process by the Ralámuli Indigenous Group

ólema-the namesake of Gladiz Esperanza Rodríguez Ríos' book—is a Ralámuli custom in which, during the fourth day after a person has died, he or she is guided towards their new life, which the author describes as a death-celebration-end process.

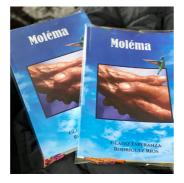
Ríos was born in the municipality of Guachochi, Chihuahua, located in the north of Mexico. She has been a teacher in indigenous communities for more than 20 years, creating and implementing projects to foster literacy acquisition in the native tongue of Ralámuli students, as well as documenting the traditions and customs of this indigenous group. The book was written in 2021 and, though she had technically finished it in just a few months, she chose to wait before publishing in order to carry out all of the celebrations that are part of the deceased ritual, and therefore be able to depict these experiences in detail within the book. It is for this reason that the text is considered autobiographical in addition to its important ethnographic notes about this specific indigenous community.

This book is edited by the Mexican editorial Laripse, of which only 1000 copies were printed. Unfortunately, it was one of the last projects of this publishing house. The book can be acquired through the State Reading Program of Chihuahua, and is not yet available through other distribution channels, but it is hoped that this situation that will soon change, due to the importance of the work.

Throughout this text, the author narrates both in Ralámuli and in Spanish, outlining the details that characterise this ritual by discussing the farewell of her grandmother María as an example, and at the same time revealing her valuable family history. In her historical account, she showcases the richness of the local practices of her community, highlighting the need to make them known so that they can be appreciated and, thus, preserved.

Gladiz begins by giving a brief introduction about her indigenous group, the Ralámuli-also known in Spanish as Tarahumara-using data from both those that identify with cultural identity and the speakers of the language of the same name. She emphasises the key concept of self-classification in regards of the ethnic origin, which is supported by laws such as the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico (2021). These laws establish in their second article that each individual has the freedom to identify themselves as a member of an indigenous group, based on a

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Gladiz Esperanza Rodríguez Ríos has been a teacher in indigenous communities for more than twenty years, creating and implementing projects to foster literacy acquisition in the native tongue of Ralámuli students, as well as documenting the traditions and customs of this indigenous group.

cultural, historical or linguistic connection, among others, which must be recognised by the Mexican Estate.

Then, she enlists the municipalities of the Sierra Madre Mountains, best known as the Tarahumara Mountains, where the majority of the Ralámuli population lives. It must be noted, however, that many of them have migrated to the most populated cities of the state of Chihuahua and nearby states, mainly due to socioeconomic aspects. This situation further shows the ability of the Ralámuli to adapt to different cultural contexts, while they strive to maintain their traditions and customs.

During the introduction, the writer aptly establishes a parallel between the death rituals of different cultural groups-analysing the costumes that the oldest members of their population recreate—and the meaning that is assigned to dying. Specifically in reference to the Ralámuli culture, she describes the origins of the religion present before the Spanish conquest, recapturing the written records and oral narrations. She explains a series of key concepts, including their two deities: Mechá (the moon) and Rayénali (the sun). The Ralámuli people give thanks to these deities for the life of the deceased, and also ask them for guidance in the paths that they will embark upon during this new phase. Following the enforcement of Catholicism since the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, the worshipped deities changed to a Catholic God.

In addition, the author distinguishes between the concepts of Repoká (the body as a physical entity) and the Alewá (the soul). Though dying means that matter ceases to exist, the Alewá stays, so it must be taken care of and accompanied towards the path of a different existence. Hence, a series of celebrations are conducted which include—as can be expected—certain elements from Catholicism and, at the same time, components of the Ralámuli culture. This is where the importance of this testimony in its written form resides: it shows only a small part of the ample worldview of this culture which, as the author herself regretfully admits, is in danger of disappearing.

Grief in Ralámuli life, Gladiz explains, does not mean dressing in black, incontrollable crying or cancelling certain daily life activities. Evidently, those that were close to the deceased feel the loss intensely: it pains them and they are hurt by their absence and grieve the loss of the deceased. Yet, the mourning process is centred on the remembering of the life of the deceased by the family and members of the community, who take care of their Alewá, and walk with him or her towards the next phase. This happens in a series of encounters that involve the preparation of specific dishes and drinks, the use of song and dance, as well as the employment of key elements, each with their own individual meaning.

The description of the death-celebration-end process begins with the passing of grandmother María, a *Ralámuli* woman from the municipality of Urique, which is part of the region known as lower Tarahumara. There are five dialectal variants of the Ralámuli language: West, North, Peak,

Center and South, although the most common classification divides it in higher and lower Tarahumara.1

María moved to the community of Tonachi, in the municipality of Guachochi, because of her husband's work in the Cultural Missions.<sup>2</sup> These programs began after the Mexican Revolution, as a part of the educational reform that aimed to bring cultural integration into the country. Maria's husband became an important leader of the community, actively participating in the Supreme Tarahumara Council, while she focused on raising their children, taking care of the sheep and cultivating local products, such as corn and beans. She was also recognised as an Owirame—a person that knows and collects the local medicinal plants—so her services were frequently required by the people in her community.

The book is full of heartfelt memories of María: her hospitality and warmth towards every visitor, the love for her children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, her robust health and the attention she showed towards the animals she raised with abundant care. It is easy for the reader to mentally create an image of the protagonist that closely resembles the one that grandparents represent for grandchildren and, in the absence of that figure, makes him/her long for one with those attributes. Despite the author warning us from the preface that the book is about saying goodbye to a loved one, the death of the endearing character that María still comes as a surprise to the reader, and her departure is an extremely moving moment.

We are left with the consolation of joining the author, together with her relatives, in the preparation and completion of the different rituals to bid farewell to the family matriarch. Each aspect is described in great detail, therefore involving the reader in these traditions and the reason behind each one of them. It is truly fascinating to delve into something that can feel unknown and alien at the beginning, because it allows us to access in-depth knowledge about the diverse tasks that this farewell entails, and become familiarised with essential elements of Ralámuli culture.

## **Final thoughts**

Cultural expressions and knowledge related to traditions and customs of indigenous communities are an essential part of their social, historical and linguistic identity. Unfortunately, over time, phenomena such as globalisation, acculturation and discrimination have endangered its permanence and continuity. Efforts such as those displayed by the text reviewed in this article highlight the richness of the worldview of indigenous groups, as well as the urgent need to appreciate it and preserve it for future generations.

<sup>1</sup> Abel Rodríguez, 'The irruption of the Ralámuri language and population in Chihuahua, interdisciplinary conjectures', Chihuahua Hoy, 17(2019), 17-34 (22)

<sup>2</sup> Alfredo Rubio, "The Cultural Missions Programme: An early attempt at Community Development in Mexico', Community Development Journal, 13(1990), 164-169 (164).

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