

2ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON FESTIVAL CULTURE

ISFC June 2021:
Reports on conference
proceedings





Recentering Festival Studies

Report of the 2nd Annual International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC)

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Over two days in June, researchers and practitioners from different fields discussed current trends in festival cultures at the 2nd Annual International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC). Setting themes of power, empowerment and disempowerment in festival culture, the keynote lectures focused on Caribbean Carnival, including scholars from institutions across North America, Europe and the Caribbean itself. This report seeks to identify the commonalities in approaches to festival culture presented at the event and to show how a perspective taking the Caribbean and, in particular, its cultural form of Carnival as focal point benefits the discussion of contemporary global festival cultures.

As a region and cultural space, the Caribbean is characterised by its forceful subjection to early

globalisation processes located at the beginning of modern racism and colonialism. Consequently, experiences of diaspora, mobility, ethnic diversity and racial inequalities have been at the core of its socialities. Situating the Caribbean at the centre and as a counterpoint can provide insights into power dynamics of the present moment. Applied to global festival cultures, this perspective highlights inequalities laid bare in the pandemic as well as the creativity and agency of social actors in festival cultures faced with the enforced restructuring of public culture. Thus, the inclusive space of the symposium—much like Caribbean Carnival itself—made it possible to negotiate and understand current changes, while at the same time remaining grounded in the specificities of different festival cultures.

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it must be noted that authorities in Notting Hill Carnival have weaponised health and safety as a tool, and seemingly use it as a means of regulating and curtailing the Carnival. Festival organisers must employ their own qualified experts to counter this abuse.

Festival organisers can influence the crowds, stallholders and bars in popular Caribbean Carnivals to use recyclable biodegradable plastics for cups and utensils. Festivals can easily reduce their carbon footprint by monitoring and setting targets to reduce waste, particularly limiting their use of plastic.

Additionally, if festival organisers encourage and facilitate more acoustic music participation (such as steel orchestras, Afro Blocos and iron and rhythm sections) which don't require the need for generators or trailer trucks will not only have a positive environmental impact, but will also encourage more live music and diversity in our festivals. Finally, creative businesspeople employed by the festival can monetise the tremendous waste produced after the events end and produce a money stream for the festivals. This can diversify the festival's income streams, and will also take action in response to the Climate Change Emergency that affects

all our futures.

Social Justice Movements

The clamour for democracy and accountability globally during the pandemic is not likely to abate. Black Lives Matter, Hong Kong, Myanmar, the Palestinians and Gaza, Uighurs, and justice for the victims of the Grenfell Tower Fire are social justice issues that will dominate our lives for a while.

Transparency, accountability and financial justice needs to be instilled in our popular festivals as well. Social Justice will be an aspect of many popular festivals and, in turn, so will the opposition to these movements from the authorities. The Caribbean Carnivals have engaged in social justice struggles for a long time. They constantly used the double entendre of the Kaiso songs and the themes of their masquerades to oppose and remind us of the horrors of slavery. This is in the form of Traditional mas or Ole mas, which I prefer to call Foundation Mas, as it exists and persists in the masquerade of Caribbean Carnivals to this day.

Masquerade such as Jab Jab, Jab Molassie, Moko

during the pause that the pandemic imposes. Time to self-validate, define, develop and progress the art, embed our cultural identity and address the finances of our festivals. Crucial to this process is the demand for democracy, transparency, accountability, and financial justice. After the pandemic our festivals must come back improved and culturally renewed. Our festivals must come back with a bang!

Thank you.

This symposium is now formally open.

Let us exchange and learn.

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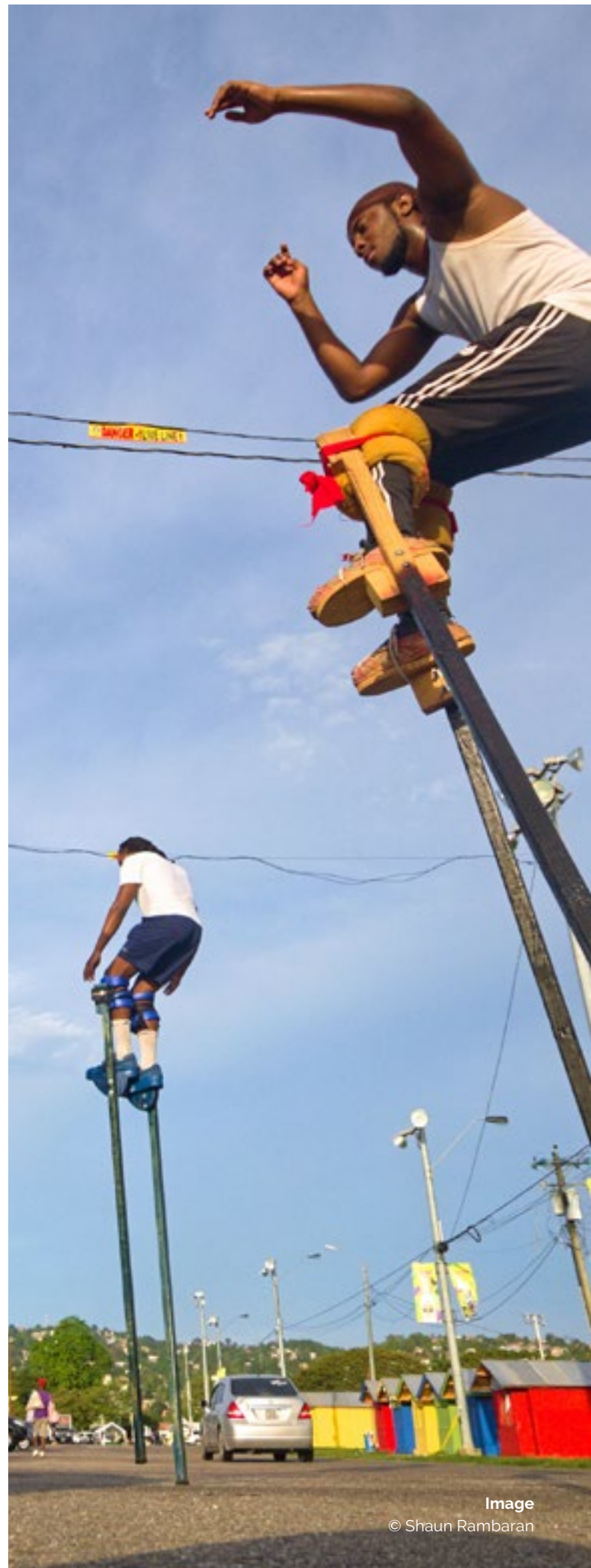


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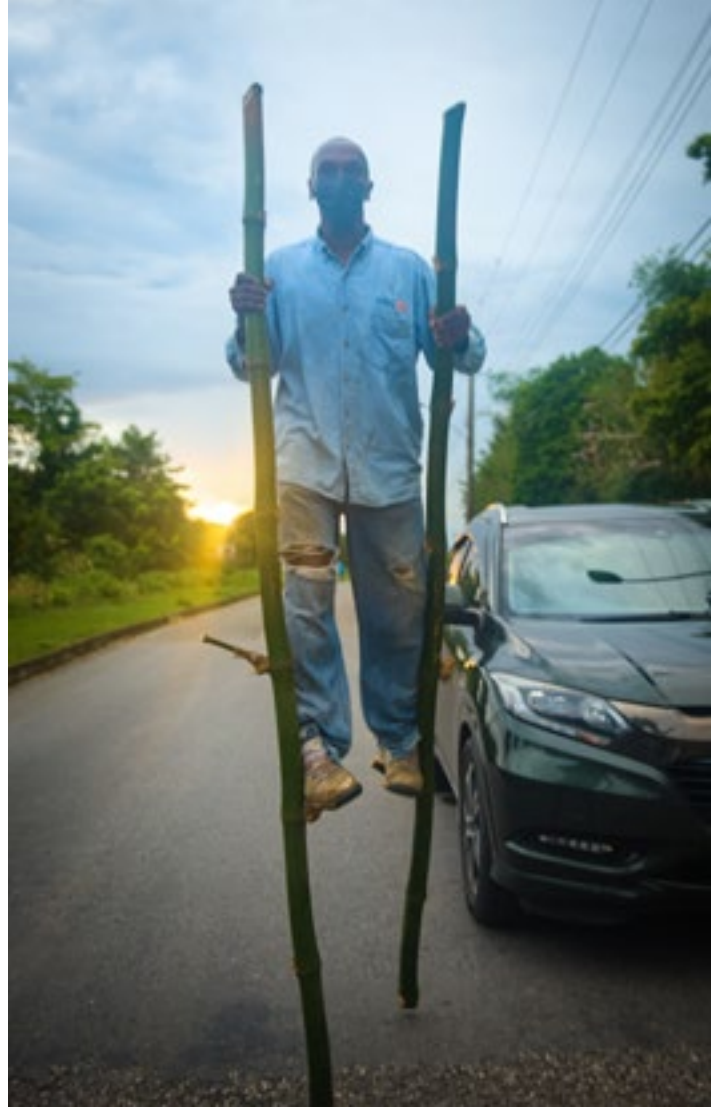




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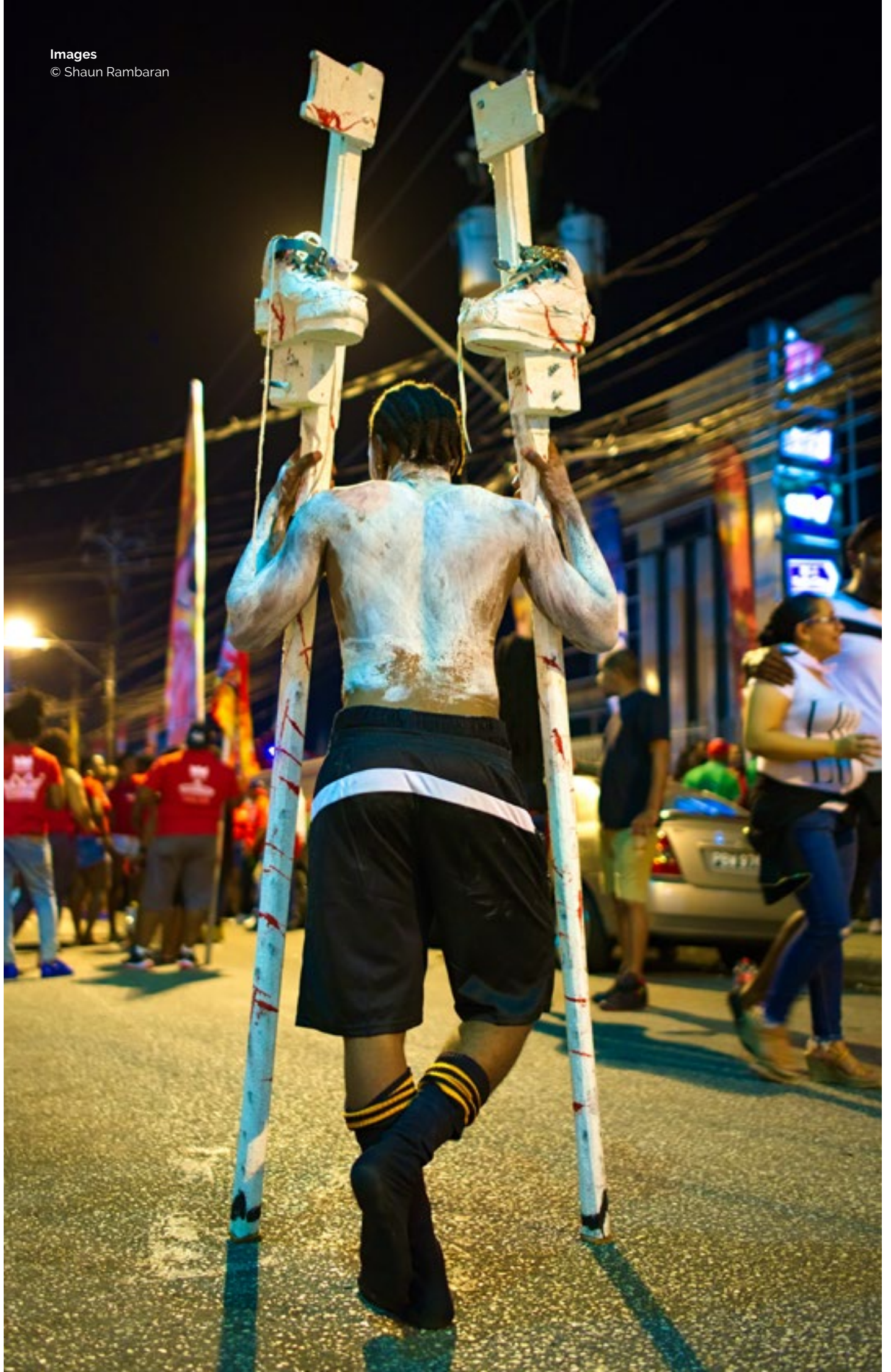






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