

Holiday Island(s): Artistic Mobilities and a Caribbean Festival

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Abstract

“Cruise to the Isle where they began the Beguine,” proclaimed an enticing 1950s Alcoa Cruise Ship advertisement. Aimed at capturing the imagination of perspective travelers, the advertisement wove a lyric fantasy that described the Caribbean archipelago with flowery prose, wrapped around vibrant graphic artistic illustrations of local Martinique and Guadeloupean dancers. Alcoa surmised that for their prospective customers, the Caribbean was not just a place, but an idea, and the company sought to control the narrative.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Caribbean region, much like the rest of world, underwent dramatic postwar economic and cultural changes. Many Caribbean nations were in the process of shedding their colonial tethers and eager to forge new economic opportunities out of the embers of the former plantation economies of the region. Some

Image

Brute Force Steel Orchestra
(1952). Author's collection.

Keywords

*Tourism, Mobilities, Carnival,
Steelband, Remade Traditions,
Post-Colonialism, Caribbean
Independence*

Caribbean islands—such as Antigua and Barbuda, St. Thomas, and the Bahamas—had brokered in luxury tourism since the beginning of the twentieth century; however, by the early 1950s the government and economic leaders of the Caribbean region sought to leverage their biggest commodities—sun, sea, and sand—and focus on developing tourism.

An early effort to foster more robust tourism came from the Caribbean Tourism Association which, in 1952, sponsored a ten-day festival in Puerto Rico, bringing together musicians and dance troupes from across the Caribbean. The program of music, dance, and mas (masquerade) offered visitors a cultural tour through the archipelago, celebrating each country through its unique “folkloric” artistic heritage. The festival spurred enthusiasm in the region for celebrating Caribbean artistry and would later serve as the model for the current CARIFESTA festival.

The cultural tourism presented at the 1952 Caribbean Festival of the Arts, though, is deeply entwined with American and European cultural tastes and their transoceanic mobilities. As Caribbean tourism resumed following WWII, many Caribbean countries faced cultural reckonings and worked to remake and rebrand elements of their unique cultural identities and heritage festivals (music, dance, Carnival), attempting to create a single Caribbean-wide “island paradise”, that would be ambiguously located but easily marketable by the tourism industry. Later dubbed “Holiday Island” by the Alcoa Cruise Ship company, this newly-imagined pan-Caribbean identity resists modernization, and instead clings to a colonial past while projecting an innocent present. It also marks a shift in the power dynamic for many people in the Caribbean, who saw their government and economic structures shift from colonial power to corporate power in the span of little over a decade.

This study will examine and contextualise the Caribbean Festival of the Arts as a facet of the broader reaches of Caribbean tourism development – especially the influence of American cultural imperialism and Caribbean nation building. In particular, this study explores the work of pioneering anthropologist Lisa Lekis in curating representative Caribbean dance and music participants for the festival as well as the power balance—and subsequent imbalance—created by the organisers of the Caribbean Festival of the Arts who empowered local Caribbean artists to celebrate and foster their heritage while also simultaneously manipulating them to adapt and remake their cultural products into marketable commodities more closely aligned with the island fantasy promoted by the tourism industry.

Introduction

“Cruise to the Isle where they began the Beguine” proclaimed an enticing 1950s Alcoa Cruise Ship advertisement. Aimed at capturing the imagination of perspective travelers, the advertisement wove a lyric fantasy that described the region with the flowery prose, “the Lovely

islands of the West Indies stretch like stepping-stones across the blue Caribbean”, wrapped around an artistic depiction of local Martiniquan and Guadeloupan dancers¹. Alcoa surmised that for a majority of their prospective customers, the Caribbean was not just a place, but an idea, and the company sought to control the narrative.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Caribbean region, much like the rest of world, underwent dramatic postwar economic and cultural changes. Many Caribbean nations were in the process of shedding their colonial tethers and eagerly forged new economic opportunities out of the embers of the former plantation and industrial economies of the region. Some Caribbean islands—such as Antigua and Barbuda, St. Thomas, and the Bahamas—had brokered in luxury tourism since the beginning of the twentieth century; however, by the early 1950s the government and economic leaders of the Caribbean basin sought to leverage their biggest commodities—sun, sea, and sand—and focus on developing tourism.

One such early effort to foster more robust tourism came from the Caribbean Tourism Association’s Caribbean Festival of the Arts, which

¹ *The art for the advertisements was created by noted graphic design artist James L. Bingham. See Mimi Sheller, 'Cruising Cultures: Post-War Tourism and the Circulation of Caribbean Musical Performances, Recordings and Representations', in Sun, Sea and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean, ed. by Timothy Rommen, Daniel T Neely (eds) (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 73-100.*

² *Alcoa Cruise Advertisement, art by James Bingham. This image along with text written by Lisa Lekis appeared in several magazines such as Holiday Magazine starting in 1955.*

Cruise to the isles where they began the Beguine

The lovely islands of the West Indies stretch like stepping-stones across the Blue Caribbean. You can visit them comfortably and leisurely on modern Alcoa 12-passenger freighters! Or, you may prefer to take a Caribbean cruise on one of Alcoa's air-conditioned passenger ships, calling at six ports in Venezuela, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Curaçao or the Dominican Republic. These ships carry an average of only 65 passengers each, yet provide every convenience for your comfort—outdoor pool, lovely public rooms and bedrooms that are all outside with private baths. You travel in private-yacht luxury when you cruise with Alcoa.

Freighter trips average 3-6 weeks, sail from New York, Montreal and New Orleans. Passenger ship cruises take 16 days, sail weekly from New Orleans. See your travel agent, or write to Dept. 'H' for literature.

THIS IS THE BEGUINE! A combination of African rhythms and French melody that is indigenous to Martinique and Guadeloupe. We now get an extended play LP EPW! Signally reminding of the beguine and other French West Indies hill dances, together with dramatic text, its reading is fit to sing "H" at the New York address below. Ask for record No. 4 in our series of Caribbean Soundings.

ALCOA
saves the Caribbean

WITH PASSENGER AND FREIGHT SERVICE TO 50 PORTS

NICOA STEAMSHIP COMPANY, INC., 37 BATTERY PLACE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 100, BY ONE CANAL STREET, NEW ORLEANS 12, LOUISIANA.

Image
Alcoa Cruise Advertisement (1955)²

was held in Puerto Rico in 1952. This study will examine and contextualise the Caribbean Festival of the Arts as a facet of the broader reaches of Caribbean tourism development – especially the influence of American cultural imperialism and Caribbean nation building. In particular, this study explores the work of pioneering anthropologist Lisa Lekis in curating representative Caribbean dance and music participants for the festival as well as the power balance—and subsequent imbalance—created by the organisers of the Caribbean Festival of the Arts who empowered local Caribbean artists to celebrate and foster their heritage while also simultaneously manipulating them to adapt and remake their cultural products into marketable commodities more closely aligned with the island fantasy co-created and promoted by the tourism industry.

Caribbean Tourism of the 1950s

American and European tourists have a long history in the Caribbean that began in earnest at the start of the twentieth century and greatly expanded following the close of WWII³. The post war period of economic prosperity and the booming American economy (amongst others) saw a newly-emerging middle-class, eager to explore the possibilities of their new-found disposable income. Facets of this growing wealth were reflected in the global expansion of the travel industry which, thanks to the solidified route agreements of the airline industry, could connect patrons to the most remote areas of the world at a moment's notice. With their newfound mobility, tourists became increasingly interested in traveling to island destinations, Hawaii or French Polynesia for example, which were previously only accessible via long ship or cruise ship voyages. The proximity and ease of travel to the Caribbean Islands saw the archipelago emerge in the late 1940s and early 1950s as one of the premier exotic vacation destinations for many burgeoning middle-class Americans and Europeans⁴.

Fueled by the post-war economic boom, the semiotic trappings of this new brand of Caribbean tourism relied heavily on foreign impressions and interpretations of local culture and art. Following the austerity of WWII, the burgeoning American and European middle class was the target market for most Caribbean tourism, and the resulting cultural tourism is thus deeply entwined with contemporary American and European cultural tastes and their transoceanic mobilities. As Caribbean tourism resumed following WWII, many Caribbean countries faced cultural reckonings brought on by the influx of tourists and dramatic waning of colonial industries, such as agriculture (sugar cane, for example)⁵. Many Caribbean countries worked to remake and rebrand elements of their unique cultural identities and local heritage festivals. The vibrant music, dance, and Carnival traditions found throughout the Caribbean were, in some cases, altered while attempting to create a single Caribbean-wide fictitious "island paradise" ambiguously located but easily marketable by the tourism industry. The concept was later dubbed "Holiday Island" by the Alcoa Cruise Ship company, and sociologist Mimi Sheller argues that this newly-imagined pan-Caribbean

³ See Joshua Jelly-Schapiro *Island People: The Caribbean and the World* (New York: Vintage, 2017), pp. 2-20; and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, *Take Me to My Paradise: Tourism and Nationalism in The British Virgin Islands* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 1-36.

⁴ For more information on American post-WWII tourism, see http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/route66/Postwar_years_of_Route66.html The National Park Service, Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism Beyond the Border* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

⁵ For more information on the modernization of the plantocracy in the Caribbean, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1963).

identity was especially potent because it resisted modernization, and instead clung to a colonial past while projecting an innocent present⁶.

Caribbean Festival of the Arts

A prime example of the tourism industry's influence on cultural remaking was in Puerto Rico in 1952, where the Caribbean Tourism Association sponsored a ten-day festival that brought together musicians and dance troupes from across the Caribbean. The Caribbean Festival of the Arts (hereafter Caribbean Festival) featured a rich program of music, dance, and mas (masquerade), offering a rich cultural tour through the archipelago, and celebrating each country through its unique "folkloric" artistic heritage, as identified by festival organisers. According to the official festival program, this included the "history, music, tradition, superstition; Christianity and Paganism; song, dance, color, artcraft [sic] and ingenuity resulting from adversity' the story of many peoples, the story of many races, the struggles of legions of plain human beings; in short the high folklore of the Caribbean Sea."⁷

⁶ Sheller, "Cruise culture," p. 93.

⁷ Anonymous Author, *Caribbean Festival of the Arts: Souvenir Program* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Imprenta Venezuela, 1952), p. 2.

⁸ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, p. 9.



Image
Description of Trinidad, Caribbean Festival of the Arts Souvenir Program (1952)⁸

The cross-regional Caribbean Festival was a novel concept in 1952, and was part of a larger, Caribbean-wide unification movement that would later spark the short-lived West Indian Federation (1958-1962) and serve as the model for the CARIFESTA festival, established in 1972⁹. The theme of unification was central to the Caribbean Festival's attempts to celebrate the diverse music and culture of the Caribbean as a collection of individual countries. According to host Dona Felisa Rincon De Gautier, mayor of San Juan, "from this interchange of old-time songs and dances and stories, will surely come a closer feeling of fellowship among all of us, the countries of the Caribbean. Fellowship based on understanding and sympathy – isn't that just what the world needs today?"¹⁰ Though earnest in their attempt, the fellowship and understanding of culture and art championed by the Caribbean Festival was, despite their efforts, more consistent with that of World's Fairs than organisers might have realised. Following WWII to the 1980s, the focus of World's Fair participants changed from one of technological discovery to one of cultural exchange and globalization. As the connection of the globe in both an economic and cultural sense became self-evident post-WWII, superpower countries such as the United States and Russia sought to promote carefully selected perceived strengths of their culture for international audiences. Scholar Scott Nelson calls these efforts the "Disney performance tradition", and I further suggest that one could pair the Caribbean Festival's program with Disney's EPCOT center in Orlando, Florida, as one in the same, due to their ability to reflect what Nelson calls "the tastes and preconceptions of its day, while still retaining a suitable degree of novelty and authenticity."¹¹

The daily schedule of the Caribbean Festival was filled with parades, concerts, events, expos, fashion shows, dance performances, and handicraft tutorials. Festival organisers referred to the program as a "show of shows" with significant collaboration among the performers of participant nations. Events were held in venues spread throughout the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico and the opening ceremonies, for example, featured a parade from Plaza Colon to Plaza Baldorioty that included torchlight processions featuring Antigua's Brute Force Steel Orchestra, who played on foot, while leading contingents from Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Surinam, Guadeloupe, US Virgin Islands and Curacao, in a spectacle reminiscent of Olympic opening ceremonies. After arriving to the Plaza, there was a lengthy Decima dance contest followed by a ceremony to introduce the various dance groups. This was followed by another short performance of steelband music by Antigua's Brute Force Steel Orchestra and dances led by the Geoffrey Holder-led Trinidadian dance troupe. Every evening, the Caribbean Festival featured a primetime concert or performance, followed by grand displays of fireworks. This was followed by street dancing to the music of Antigua's Brute Force Steel Orchestra for attendees leaving the nightly performances.¹²

In presenting a collection of the cultural heritages of the Caribbean, the Caribbean Festival struck a balance between novelty and authenticity, therefore organisers made significant efforts to evoke the lore of the

⁹ John Hearne, *Carifesta Forum: An Anthology of 20 Caribbean Voices*, ed (Kingston, Jamaica: Carifesta 76, 1976).

¹⁰ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, p 3.

¹¹ Steve Nelson, 'Walt Disney's EPCOT and the World's Fair Performance Tradition', *Drama Review: TDR*, 30 .4 (Winter 1986): pp. 106–46.

¹² *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, pp. 17-18.

Caribbean's past while also celebrating and inspiring the region's just, verdant, and prosperous future. Yet, ugly chapters of the Caribbean's story (slavery and colonialism) were omitted, and underwriting most decisions governing the festival and its production was tourism, present and future. Festival executive director Waldemar Lee was frank in his assessment that the idea of celebrating a Caribbean Festival was recognised by the Caribbean Tourist Association as the "most effective joint enterprise to promote the development of the tourist industry in the Caribbean."¹³ The strategy of celebrating the uniqueness of individual countries in order to promote the Caribbean region as a whole was a prevalent theme tracked throughout the newspaper coverage of the Caribbean Festival. For example, the New York Times announced winter travel packages to the region in the same article covering the cultural program of the Caribbean Festival, and the Chicago Tribune meticulously chronicled the Caribe Hilton, Condado Beach Hotel, and other resorts at which festival events were to occur.¹⁴

Lisa Lekis

For the selection and vetting of the performers and cultural products for the Caribbean Festival, executive director Lee relied on Lisa Lekis, an intrepid American anthropologist who specialised in Caribbean and Latin American dance, as artistic director. Lekis and her husband Walter featured prominently as performing artists and teachers throughout the national folkdance scene in the United States. Lisa Lekis was a trained anthropologist and ethnomusicologist—she would earn a Ph.D. in anthropology in 1956—with an eclectic background. Born in Mississippi and raised in Montana, she earned a degree in psychology from Stanford University, attended the University of Chicago school of social work, was a founding member of the California Federation of Folk Dance, and taught courses in Latin American folklore for the American Institute of Foreign Trade. Lekis also worked in advertising and publicity for several large corporations in New York and the American Southwest. From 1950-1953, she worked for the University of Puerto Rico, where she directed the dance program and established an initiative teaching and studying dance in rural schools of Puerto Rico.¹⁶

An inquisitive researcher, talented dancer and dynamic personality, Lekis was dedicated to the study of regional and ethnic folk dances. Determined to bring these unappreciated, unknown, or dying folk dance styles to the public, Lekis followed in the footsteps of pioneering anthropologists Katherine Dunham and Alan Lomax with their attempts at bringing these folk dance styles to the mainstream public. Lekis was also inspired by the efforts of Trinidadian dancer/anthropologists Beryl McBurnie and Geoffrey Holder to bring the traditional dance styles of the Caribbean to the American stage and dance hall.

Following the wartime and post-war boom of swing and big band jazz music across North America, by the early 1950s, Caribbean music and dances were circulating through recordings and dance halls into mainstream "white" America. During this decade, Latin Dance crazes

¹³ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Leslie Highly, 'Caribbean Festival: Puerto Rico to Play Host To Inter-Island Exhibit', *New York Times*, 15 April 1951, p. 255, and 'The Tribune Travelers' Guide: All Caribbean Isles to Join in Huge Fete', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 June 1952, p. H5.



Image
Dancer and Anthropologist
Lisa Lekis (1952)¹⁵

¹⁵ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, p. 5.

¹⁶ This biographical information comes from an unpaginated biography that accompanies the dissertation of Lisa Lekis. See Lisa Lekis, *The Origin and Development of Ethnic Caribbean Dance and Music*, diss. (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1956).

such as the mambo, rhumba, pachenga, and later calypso, succeeded in capturing the imagination of the cultural mainstream, enabled by several factors including the wartime memories of WWII G.I.'s reassimilating back to civilian life, post-war tourism, and anthropologists such as Lekis who scoured the Caribbean, searching for intriguing and culturally important folk dance styles. In 1956, Lekis submitted her Ph.D. dissertation "The origin and development of ethnic Caribbean dance and music", which was based on fieldwork that she had conducted during 1951 and 1952, while preparing for the Caribbean Festival. Her fieldwork further yielded the core research for two books published on the subject of Caribbean dance, *Folk Dances of Latin America* (1958) and *Dancing Gods* (1960).¹⁷

Caribbean Festival Selection Process

The Caribbean Festival featured participant countries from the southernmost Caribbean (Surinam) up north to Haiti and many in between, though precisely how the various countries were selected for inclusion at the Caribbean Festival is unclear from surviving historical records. What is clear, however, is that the process was governed by the economic interests of member nations of the Caribbean Tourism Association and influenced by the US State Department. Though the Caribbean Tourism Association was interested in promoting and preserving the unique cultural products of the individual islands, the primary goals of the Caribbean Festival was to generate media attention and to drive tourism. These dual interests, seemingly mutually exclusive, were intertwined in an effective advertising campaign. The US State Department would later make this type of personal face-to-face diplomacy an essential part of government policy during the Eisenhower presidential administration (1953-1961).¹⁸ Known as the P-Factor, the State Department made it a policy of hiring anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to conduct fieldwork and work on public diplomacy initiatives in developing nations throughout the globe. These field operatives promoted American policy, democracy, and in many cases imperialism, while also generating legitimate, peer-reviewed scholarly research.¹⁹

The organisers of Caribbean Festival, in hiring Lekis to conduct fieldwork research and search out suitable folk music and dance acts for the festival, unknowingly foreshadowed the US Government's effective policies of public diplomacy by several years. Interestingly, Lekis and her husband Walter had aspirations of one day joining the US foreign service and their adventures to the various outposts and backwaters in the Caribbean only fueled their desires for linking anthropological research and foreign diplomacy.²⁰ Yet despite their worldly ambitions, Lisa Lekis, like many Americans of the era, was the first to admit that she knew little of the Caribbean's vast folk dance styles prior to her fieldwork in the region. Moreover, she appears to have fallen victim to many of the mainstream assumptions of the Caribbean which were, mainly, a propensity of grouping the entire basin's countries and their individual cultural expressions together, referring to Caribbean folk dance as a

¹⁷ Lisa Lekis, *Folk dances of Latin America* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1958); Lisa Lekis, *Dancing Gods* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1960).

¹⁸ Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 260-70.

¹⁹ See also Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015) pp. 1-18.

²⁰ Walter Lekis was Canadian and had yet to earn a Green Card at the start of the couple's fieldwork in 1951. Ray Funk interview with Andrew Martin (10 August 2021).

²¹ Lisa Lekis, 'Choreography in the Caribbeans', *Dance Magazine*, July 1952, p. 18.

"wild jumble of rumba, ruffled shirts and maracas."²¹ Nonetheless, Lekis was a dedicated anthropologist who truly believed in the importance of discovering, studying, and celebrating folk dance styles of the world's peoples. She would later argue in a scholarly article when describing the Caribbean Festival that it was important for dancers and artists of different countries and cultures to explore one another because, "An interchange of ideas helps clarify an awareness of cultural differences and similarities, and may possibly continue to stimulate the expression of a people to whom dance is very vital and subtle means of expression."²²

Lekis held the position of artistic director at the Caribbean Festival from 1951 until 1953, and leveraged this to its fullest advantage. She used the post to facilitate the extensive fieldwork throughout the Caribbean, which was necessary in order for her to create a comprehensive survey of the region's many folk dance cultures. Her drive to document unique folk dances in the Caribbean was informed by her work in rural Puerto Rico, where she realised that through assimilation and modernization many of these traditional, especially rural, dances were being lost. The greater Caribbean region was slower to modernise, in her estimation, and Lekis noted during her fieldwork that, "frankly, my own feeling is that this island [Puerto Rico] is poorer in material than any other of the West Indies group," and she further lamented that unfortunately, "so much of the ethnic music of the island [Puerto Rico] is gone or going fast."²³

Puerto Rico served as a home base for Lekis from which she travelled to the various countries in the Caribbean, conducting fieldwork for two to three weeks at any given stop. Member nations of the Caribbean Tourism Association sent local agents to meet Lekis at each stop and help ascertain local folk music and dance suitable for the Caribbean Festival. Finding local talent and unique folk dance cultures was easy; but, identifying a professional group capable of performing to a consistent standard was more challenging. Add to this the need for travel documents/papers such as passports, visas, etc and one can see the complexity of the situation at hand. The anthropologist in Lekis was, nonetheless, committed to documenting all of the folk dance cultures encountered during fieldwork trips and she carried along a video and audio recorder with her to each stop. These field recordings were intended to familiarise Caribbean Festival organisers with the incoming groups; however, despite Lekis' limited skills as a recording engineer, many of her audio recordings were of a quality high enough to be collated and issued by Folkways Records as the album *Caribbean Dances* in 1953.²⁴ The recording devices sparked curiosity from many of the dancers and musicians in the field, as the *Miami Herald* noted, "Everywhere she went during the weeks she travelled in the Caribbean Miss Lekis and the idea of the festival were greeted with enthusiasm. The only hesitancy came from a remote group of bush negroes [sic] in Surinam, who eyed Miss Lekis and her recording machine with considerable doubt."²⁵ The casual racism notwithstanding, as of 1952 very few researchers had traveled through the remote reaches of the Caribbean, fewer still with audio/video recording equipment, and a woman no less, making the newspaper's depiction, though editorialised

²² *Ibid*, p. 38.

²³ Letter from Lisa Lekis to Harold Courlander, November 25, 1952. This document is held in the Moses and Frances Asch Archive, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, D.C.

²⁴ Walter Lekis, and Lisa Lekis, *Caribbean Dances*, (New York: Folkways FP 6840, Smithsonian Global Sound for Libraries, 1953).

²⁵ Horace Sutton, 'Caribbean Dance Carnival Ready', *The Miami Herald Miami, Florida*, 20 July 1952, p. 72.



from an imperialist American perspective, somewhat convincing. Still, despite Lekis's attempts to comprehensively document folk dance and music of specific countries, her primary duty to the Caribbean Festival was to identify the most representative folk dance and music of a given island's culture in order to further assess its marketability by the Caribbean Tourism Association.

Image

Prince Family Clown Mas Troupe and Brute Force Steel Orchestra, Antigua 1952.²⁹

²⁶ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program, p. 2.*

Culture Winners and Losers

The 1952 Caribbean Festival in Puerto Rico succeeded in showcasing many important music and dance styles of the Caribbean to a wide audience. The festival was, however, not without unintended consequences as it simultaneously empowered Caribbean artists while also manipulating them to adapt and remake their cultural products to more closely align with the island fantasy envisioned and promoted by the tourism industry. A subtle side effect of the type of festival cultural tourism presented at the Caribbean Festival was the ways in which agents of the tourism industry picked de facto winners and losers among local cultural products and performers. In singling out specific and purportedly "unique" local culture ensembles, festival organisers ignored the cultural pluralism of the region and instead reduced the cultural diversity of individual islands to their hand-picked representatives. The festival program further highlighted these choices, noting that the "kaleidoscopic combination engendered in each island is different and unique " and further "Curacao and Aruba have their bula waya; Trinidad its calypso; St. Croix its Jig player; Puerto Rico its bomba,

seises and plena; Haiti, all its mysterious voodoo; Jamaica its strange rituals; Guadeloupe and Martinique their exciting beguine; Surinam its exotic East-Indian and primitive bush negro rhythms; Antigua its steel band and clown dancers; and Grenada its unique cocoluter."²⁶

The above comments further indicate how the Caribbean Festival took a complex set of musical genres and cultural practices with roots and interconnectedness across the Caribbean archipelago and reduced and purified them into singular "typical" genres that, in their eyes and ears, were characteristic of the diversity of each individual island. By immobilizing and encapsulating "the folk" in time and space, these cultural practices/artifacts became more easily consumed by American and European tourists.²⁷ Posterity suggests that festival organisers succeeded in their efforts, as foreign tourism has steadily increased in the Caribbean for the past seventy years. Detractors, too, were many, and some such as Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul famously argued that the nations of the Caribbean were, "in the name of tourism, are selling themselves into a new slavery."²⁸

Reducing a country and its people to a single representative art form is problematic at best, and one need not look any further than the clown mas and steelbands of Antigua and Barbuda as examples. Clowns can be found in Carnivals throughout the Caribbean, as well as in the diaspora in New York, Toronto, and London. With their jingles and reflective metals and mirrors dotting their costumes, the jovial clowns were some of the most beloved Carnival characters for the people of Antigua and Barbuda during the 1950s, especially Christmas celebrations in the early and mid-part of the decade and Carnival celebrations starting in 1957.

Cherished as they may be in Antigua, clown mas has served an important role for people throughout the Caribbean diaspora since the nineteenth century.³⁰ In the Trinidad Carnival, for example, clowns were often partnered with bats, and sometimes Pierots, who recited verses from classical literature (Shakespeare, etc.) and these characters would later morph into today's jab jabs.³¹ Caribbean scholar Kim Johnson has long argued that transported Africans across the Caribbean diaspora and the globe used any opportunity to practice masking, drumming, and dancing in processions. The combination of these mediums in practice was, and continues to be, important for their collective psychological survival. He notes, "hence places like Congo Square in New Orleans, the Catholic countries had Carnival and the Protestant countries had Christmas or Cropover, Junkanoo in Jamaica and Bahamas, St Kitts had mummings at Christmas, other islands used Easter."³² In Trinidad and elsewhere, clowns are one of several dozen Carnival mas characters and their popularity ebbs and flows every few years, based on the public tastes of the current generations of masqueraders.

In Antigua, clowns were often paired with bulls, (another traditional Carnival mas character) creating a contrast between the whimsy and macabre that embraces the bacchanal of Carnival. Notes Antiguan Jim

²⁷ Andrew Martin and Mimi Sheller, 'Kaleidoscopic Combinations': Artistic Archipelagoes and Touristic Mobilities in the Making of the Caribbean Festival, paper delivered at Archipelagic Imperial Spaces and Mobilities Workshop, (University of Leipzig, July 16 2021).

²⁸ V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 210.

²⁹ 'Clown Mas,' *postcard, produced by the Tourism Association of Antigua and Barbuda, 1952.*

³⁰ Daniel J. Crowley, 'The Traditional Masques of Carnival', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 4. 3/4, (March, 1956 June, 1956, p. 218.

³¹ Kim Johnson, *Email correspondence to the author* (March 23, 2021).

³² Kim Johnson, *Email to the author* (March 24, 2021).

³³ Andrew Martin, Interview with Jim Nanton (April 22, 2021).

Nanton, "I was terrified by bulls as a child, but seeing them also meant that clowns would be close behind—and they were pure joy."³³ Clown mas characters of Antigua also enjoyed the frequent accompaniment of steelbands in a spectacle for the senses. The charm and fantasy of the experience caught the attention of Lisa Lekis, who was enraptured by the clowns and steelbands of Antigua during her fieldwork trip to the island in April of 1952. As noted above, Lekis was searching for cultural acts to document and promote for the Caribbean Tourism Association's upcoming Caribbean Festival in Puerto Rico, and chose a clown dance troupe led by the Prince family (Roland and Sydney Prince) and the Brute Force Steel Orchestra to represent Antigua.

Antigua's brand of clown mas dancers was also celebrated for its "uniqueness" at the Caribbean Festival, which reads as racialised code for their adaptation of European dance elements. In contrast to their counterparts in other Caribbean islands, Antiguan clown mas dancers often added old English and Scottish country dances (performed in what was described as a "West Indian" Fashion) to their repertoires of traditional African/Caribbean-based clown-type dances. This made them more accessible to practitioners of American folk dancing keen to try something a little more exotic. Caribbean Festival organisers called the Antiguan clown dance troupe "truly fascinating" and "Antigua is developing its own folklore—a movement of the people themselves to establish their own tradition of dance and music." Festival organisers, however, were also quick to note that the folklore of Antigua is perhaps more accessible for the American cultural mainstream than one might think, noting "the primitive rhythms and art patterns have crept into our [American] everyday life to a much greater extent than we realise."³⁴

In 1952, while the steelband movement struggled with street violence and acceptance in Trinidad—its place of origin—the Caribbean Festival organisers saw the potential of the instrument's sound and image as a marketing tool. Steelbands were first introduced to Antigua in 1946 by oil workers travelling to and from Trinidad. The first Antigua Panorama steelband competition was held in 1949, and innovative and talented Antiguan panman swiftly developed steelbands in the 1950s that, in some cases, surpassed the quality of their Trinidadian counterparts. Steelbands quickly established themselves as an integral component of the tourism industry in Antigua, and Caribbean Festival literature highlighted the reformed reputation of the Antiguan steelbands movement, noting that it was "once disreputable and ostracised is now becoming more respectable and is recognised as one of the few new musical discoveries of the modern age."³⁵ In an attempt to further distance them from their counterparts in the greater Caribbean, organisers continued to praise the Antiguan steelband movement, stating "in Antigua the steel band [sic] has been particularly well developed" and "the Brute Force Steel Band from Antigua is one of the finest of this new medium."³⁶

That steelband, the other Caribbean artform singled-out by Lekis, was presented as most-reflective of Antiguan culture and society is

³⁴ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, p. 23.

³⁵ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, pp. 23-24. *In 1957 Antigua and Barbuda created a Carnival during the summer months (opposite its traditional place during Lent) to boost offseason tourism and commemorate emancipation of Antiguan slaves on August 1, 1834. Included in this Carnival was an annual Panorama competition, further cementing the connection between steelbands and tourism on the island.*

³⁶ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, pp. 23-24.

somewhat peculiar. Since its humble beginnings in Trinidad during the late 1930s, the steelpan has steadily developed into a finely crafted instrument and serious musical art form. While it is true that in Trinidad and Tobago steelpan is very much a form of cultural expression and community identity, one cannot deny that for the past 70 years the global growth and development of steelpan and steelbands outside of Trinidad and Tobago—both the musical and sociological trajectories—is substantial. Other Caribbean islands, Antigua and Barbuda for example, embraced the instrument as early as the 1940s, creating vibrant—and not at all insular—musical scenes dotted across Caribbean archipelago. Presently, the unmistakable steelband sound has firmly asserted itself as the representative music of the Caribbean. Steelbands are ubiquitous among major tourist attractions across the globe from Disney World (Florida) to London to Tokyo, and steelpans can also be heard in popular music from rock to hip hop to western classical orchestras.

The roots of this global steelpan takeover were well underway in 1952 and Lekis could have quite as easily chosen Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, and perhaps Guyana—each with substantial steelband scenes—as worthy holders of the steelband crown. As noted above, Lekis recorded steelbands during her fieldwork trip to Antigua in the Spring of 1952. One of the steelbands she recorded was the Brute Force Steel Orchestra performing "Mambo #5," and this track was later issued on the record *Caribbean Dances* in 1953 by Folkways Records – one of the earliest known commercially released steelband recordings. The Brute Force Steel Orchestra was a fine ensemble, but they may, at the time, only have been the third best steelband in Antigua. By 1952, Trinidad and Tobago boasted well over one hundred steelbands.

Despite the fact that benna, a calypso song precursor, and calypso were arguably more culturally important to Antiguan, the Prince family clown dance troupe and the Brute Force Steel Orchestra represented Antigua and Barbuda at the Caribbean Festival. These two artforms (clown mas and steelband) were touted as the country's unique artistic heritage because they could be distilled away from other forms of cultural expression. Steelbands and clown mas were visually and aurally stimulating, distinctive, and reproducible, and thus highly prized for their marketing and branding potential. Since the 1950s mas, calypso (benna), soca, and steelband have competed for the soul for most Antiguan; however, the Caribbean Festival ensured that only clown mas and steelbands competed for the spoils of the present and future tourist industry in the country.

Conclusions

Following the completion of the Caribbean Festival in 1952, Lisa Lekis returned briefly to her work in the dance department of the University of Puerto Rico. She left the post in early 1953, taking a job as an advertising consultant for Alcoa Cruise Ship Co., in New York where she employed many of the tools and techniques learned in Puerto Rico the years prior. Alcoa advertising created by Lekis ran constantly in major American

newspapers during the 1950s and early 1960s, and was heavily influential in establishing the holiday island perception many Americans had, and still have, of the Caribbean as a tourist destination. As impactful as it may be, Lekis' work for Alcoa should not, however, exclusively define her legacy, as she was a pioneering anthropologist in nearly every aspect of her career. As a female operating in a largely male dominated field, she succeeded in documenting Caribbean music, dance, and cultures – some of which are now lost to time. Despite her prolific output and accomplishments during the 1950s, Lekis shifted her attention away from academic projects in the 1960s, focusing on teaching dance throughout the West Coast, including places such as the Santa Barbara Folk Dance Conference. Despite her relative obscurity among current scholars in the field, Lisa Lekis's key role in the formation, artistic direction, and curating of the Caribbean Festival of 1952, numerous scholarly articles and publications—including two monographs, earned doctorate in anthropology, and Caribbean Dances album released on Folkways records, combine to construct a curriculum vitae practically unrivaled by any anthropologist active during the 1950s.

The Caribbean Festival of 1952 was, in hindsight, a collection of elements of racial capital from throughout the Caribbean region. By selecting and subsequently promoting specific marketable cultural products, the Caribbean Tourism Association succeeded in producing new modalities of racial capitalism through its promotion of Caribbean tourism, dance, music recording and visual arts, which let tourists bring "a little bit of the islands home" from their vacations.³⁷ By simultaneously empowering and disempowering local artists, the 1952 Caribbean Festival serves as an important example of the ways in which the mobilities of tourist and the influence of the foreign tourism industry shaped the local and regional cultural products of many Caribbean nations. Considering that currently (2022), benna is nearly gone from Antigua and Barbuda while steelbands are thriving, many of these influences continue to shape the present and future Caribbean.

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