SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES

IDENTITY, ETHNICITY AND CULTURE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Edited by Ralph R. Premdas

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Published by: School of Continuing Studies
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine, Trinidad

ISBN: 976-620-114-5

Printed by: The Multimedia Production Centre
School of Education
Faculty of Humanities & Education
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine

CONTENTS

Introduction
Lennox Bernard vii

PART I: THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS: ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

1. The Caribbean: Ethnic and Cultural Diversity and a Typology of Identities
Ralph R. Premdas 3

2. Theories of Ethnic Contestations and their Relationship to Economic Development
Leo Despres and Ralph R. Premdas 13

PART II: CALYPSO, SOCA, CHUTNEY AND CARNIVAL: LOCAL AND GLOBALISED PERSPECTIVES

3. The State of Calypso Today
Gordon Rohlehr 29

4. Chutney Crosses over into Chutney Soca in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival
Satnarine Balkaransingh 47

CHAPTER 5

Popular Music and the Cultural Politics of Globalization among the Post-Oil Boom Generation in Trinidad

Robin Balliger
Stanford University

So Boom Generation this power is your own,
don't stand up an wonder—time to claim that throne
this is the oil spill session so free up your heart—
just throw away the water cause the fire done start.
— "Free Yourself," Home Front

In the Caribbean, expressive culture emerged as a site of struggle against slavery and colonialism. In this paper I argue for a remapping of cultural and political contestation in relation to global capitalism (Harvey 1992; Dirlik 1994; Lowe and Lloyd 1997), based on research I conducted on popular music and social stratification among young adults in Trinidad. I trace a historical transition from the nation-state as the central site of struggle for Caribbean independence movements after World War II, to a radically altered relationship to national culture for a generation I define as triply 'post': post-colonial, post-oil boom (as young adults enter the work force in a period of economic decline),

and post-ideology (in the words of triumphal capitalism). Transformed experiences of culture and place are also influenced by West Indian communities abroad and greater access to media since the early 1990s, especially the expansion of radio to fourteen stations and the introduction of cable TV and the internet. By employing a generational analysis that links transnational political economy and cultural production to situated experiences of inequality, I illustrate the ways in which national and foreign music genres mark new sites of meaning, identification and struggle for particular music audiences.

In Trinidad, "music defines the society and the society is defined by music,"[1] but how has globalization affected this definition? Calypso music voiced opposition to colonialism in Trinidad and after independence in 1962 exemplified national culture, but after a period of hopeful nationalism the nation experienced little political or economic sovereignty (Ryan 1988; Rampersad 1997). Trinidad's energy-based economy is vulnerable to market fluctuations, but increased wealth from the oil boom of 1974–82 enabled more people to engage in 'first world' consumption patterns—material wealth, travel, and access to mass media. Since the mid-1980s, poverty has increased from 3 percent to 36 percent,[2] there have been multiple currency devaluations and cuts in the public sector (Crichton and de Silva 1989; La Guerre 1994; World Bank 1995; Dookeran 1996). Privatization has included media expansion, niche marketing, and Trinidad is one of the most media-saturated environments in the Caribbean (Surlin and Soderlund 1990; Dunn 1995). In 1986, the African-based People's National Movement (PNM) was ousted after 30 years, there was a coup attempt in 1990, and the East Indian-based United National Congress (UNC) achieved victory in 1995. Indo-Trinidadians have begun contesting constructions of national culture which previously only included Afro-Trinidadian forms like calypso and steelband music (Rohlehr 1990; Hill 1993; Liverpool 1990; Warner 1983). Increased poverty, cultural and political divisiveness, and consumption of transnational media fuel social fragmentation—much of which is contested in and through popular music.

In this radically changed landscape, race has emerged in public discourse as central to cultural identification and national conflict (Premdas 1993, 1998; Yelvington 1993). Trinidad and Tobago is a

multiethnic state with 40.1 percent Indian descent, 39.3 percent African descent, 16 percent mixed, and 4 percent Chinese, White, Syrian and "other".[3] A volatile race politics points to a broader contradiction between neoliberal ideology *and* the rise in racial, religious and cultural fundamentalisms. However, I argue that ethnic conflict is not the result of unleashed primordial antagonisms, but *produced by* a changed world-system which fuels privatization, social insecurity, and new struggles over resources and territory (Verdery 1996; Stolcke 1995). Because popular music in Trinidad belongs to a history of social struggle and mass participation—and is central to definitions of national identity—music becomes a flash point for ethno-nationalist discourse. It's important to note that violent racial conflict has not occurred, but domestic violence has increased dramatically. I argue that macro-economic forces often find their expression in the household—the abstract violence of a system transferred onto immediate relationships with incredible brutality—especially as poverty and job loss are commonly experienced as emasculation among men (Sampath 1993).

In twenty months of research in Trinidad, I studied how popular music among young adults articulates new forms of affiliation at the nexus of material conditions and transnational expressions. My approach is audience-centered and I studied music as a social practice in daily life.[4] What are people listening to and why? How does music mark particular spaces and what kinds of interaction occurs? I conducted demographic research on audiences in relation to social stratification, and developed an analysis of musical meaning incorporating the semiotics of musical sound, performance context, how music organizes the activities of social groups and acts on bodies, and how music operates spatially to mark off areas of cultural and political significance. I conducted audience research across popular genres which are highly marked by race, class and age, including soca (a 'party' form of calypso), Jamaican dancehall reggae, East Indian-based chutney soca, and rock music. This work illustrates the importance of diasporic identifications including African, Indian and the association of whiteness with metropolitan power (Gilroy 1991; Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 1994).

By emphasizing ethnography and the cultural practices of specific populations, I illustrate how commodity circulation in the transnational

public sphere creates new circuits of identification and contestation (while remaining mindful of continued metropolitan dominance over 'peripheral' nations and bodies). Marked by the international division of labor, mass migration, and profound transformations in communications technologies, the new world (dis)order disrupts experiences of place and identity—generating new sites and strategies of contestation along with the new spatial domains and cultural logic of advanced capitalism (Appadurai 1990; Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Keith and Pile 1993). As people in different places increasingly face similar kinds of austerity and inequalities, transnational cultural production facilitates polylateral dialogue among aggrieved communities (Lipsitz 1994). At the same time, struggles over music are struggles over power in Trinidad, illustrated by contestations at a national level by racially-polarized political parties.

Because of space limitations, in this paper I focus on audience research, but elsewhere I discuss structural aspects of cultural production which are crucial to music circulation and distribution, changes in media, music technology, the tightening of copyright law, and the increased commodification of culture.[5] I begin with an overview of my audience research, followed by four short ethnographic scenes.

Overview of Audience Research: Music Listening vs. Public Participation

In an interview with David Rudder, he recounted a story of a calypsonian friend of his who was liming in a pub just after carnival, when the subject of the soca and calypso monarch competitions came up. He started asking people about these national competitions but almost no one could name who had won or say much about them. This anecdote foregrounds the issue of *reception*, and the possible discrepancy between media discourse about songs and what audiences are hearing or concerned about (Mankekar 1993; hooks 1993; Radway 1991). In fact, with the heightened issue of race in political commentary calypsoes, I would argue that the songs themselves have little social

impact compared with the extensive public discourse by journalists and politicians *about the songs* which continues for months after carnival.

The audience research I conducted on popular music in Trinidad first drew on surveys conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research on public participation in national festivals, market research on media usage by age, race, gender, socio-economic status and location, and direct observation of audiences in multiple settings. Based on the most popular music among my cohort of ages 18-30, I then directly surveyed audiences on site (at live shows of soca, chutney soca, dub/R&B, and rock/metal). Audience research included surveying 248 people across these four music/social groupings; drawing from the surveys I did over 40 in-depth audience interviews (and many more informal interviews); wrote extensive descriptions of events; and did another 50 interviews with musicians, DJs, record retailers, pirate cassette dealers and people involved in all aspects of cultural production. The first important point revealed by this research centers on the difference between music listening (done at home, at work, in the car, etc.) and attendance at music events or clubs which bring together bodies in a particular place.

With regard to listening, people certainly have music preferences but listening habits are incredibly diverse. This data disrupts much of the literature on music and identity which tends to flatten lived experience—as my surveying reveals that people consume an incredible variety of music which often has less to do with identity than functionality. For instance, people listen to different music based on the season, time of day, their particular mood, and so forth. The survey asked about people's favorite music and over 30 styles were listed. When asked to name their three favorite bands, a list of over 270 different favorite bands was generated, including all the major artists in soca, chutney soca, Indian film, hip hop and R&B, dancehall reggae, rock, alternative and metal.

Many of the most common short responses given for a favorite music include: "it's soothing, it's relaxing, I can free up, I relate to it, it's reality, it's my culture, I like the guitar work, it's about self-expression, it deals with the young generation, I like the beat, it makes me feel good inside, there's a lot of meaning behind it, it's conscious

and talks about problems faced by blacks, it makes me move/get a good sweat, it's good to dance to, it's emotional, it helps when having sex, it hasn't remained stagnant, it tells about everyday life, I love to sing along, it comments on the human condition, it's hot and spicy, it's easy to understand, I like to wine." One longer answer included, "hip hop and reggae is not only the music of the street, it is the voice of the disenfranchised and frustrated. Its various grooves run from the violent and intense to soothing melody without it losing it's integrity." (21 year old unemployed black male)

When we shift from music listening to participation at events a very different picture emerges. Whereas music consumption varies widely in listening, the spaces in which music occurs are bounded by race and class. This is a crucial point, as the control over space is the control over bodies and connects with dating, marriage, family, property and ultimately, national society. The central methods for dividing audiences are the physical location of events (transportation problems), cost of admission, overt race/class discrimination at point of entry, and societally reinforced racial and class divisiveness.

The most overt racial policing of any public space in Trinidad occurs at middle-class nightclubs where youth of different races (whites, Indians and Africans) are given different nights of the week to attend. While forms of racism occur constantly in Trinidad (and everywhere), the tremendous public outcry against the nightclubs in the fall of 1996 was particularly class-inflected.[6] Emphasizing race in the context of music consumption and entertainment highlights the failure of the liberal promise of the middle class as a value-free space where wealth alone determines membership and access. I also suggest that the club's protection of a space for "Trini whites" (who form only .6 percent of the population), illustrates a retreat into *racial* privilege as the French Creole economic position is challenged by the new capital of Syrian entrepreneurs and successful Indo-Trinidadian businessmen. Since the nightclubs have been under attack for racial discrimination, they have responded by increasing entrance fees beyond the means of working-class Trinidadians. Of course, 'class discrimination' is legal in liberal democracies, where economic achievement or failure is read back into the nature of the individual.

Below I describe each of the music scenes I researched, and analyze their meaning and popularity for specific audiences.

"The Fetes are a Way of Life": Soca Music and Carnival Season

In terms of its cultural heritage and contemporary marketing for tourism, Trinidad is world renowned for its carnival, which includes calypso, steelband, and soca music; and festival arts like masquerade. In general terms, calypso is considered lyrically-based and focuses on social and political commentary, while soca is musically or rhythmically-based for dancing (also referred to as 'party' or 'festival' music). Since my project is guided by actual audience participation in music, one finds that calypso and pan largely drop out of a youth cohort. Carnival represents the major period of indigenous cultural production and consumption, but the season lasts only about six weeks. Among Afro-Trinidadian youth (and many East Indian youth), soca music is the most popular during carnival season, and the same audience switches to dancehall and hip hop the remainder of the year.

Despite soca's immense popularity—dominating the airwaves and regularly drawing up to 30,000 to carnival 'fetes'—soca music has received little scholarly attention. In contrast, one can find a number of books, dissertations, and articles on calypso music and during carnival season public debate on controversial lyrics of calypso saturates the press. I believe this is due to the difficulty of using words to discuss a music and performance whose significance, I argue, lies in the feeling and effect that it generates; and in the underlying duality in dominant ideology between words and sound, mind and body.

I draw the contrast between calypso and soca as a way to examine two very different moments in Trinidadian history. In broad strokes, the difference between soca and calypso is not only one of generations but of an entire conjuncture of social, political and historical forces: calypso represents the generation who successfully fought colonialism, but for whom independence also meant succeeding in the terms and values of Western modernity— the importance of speech being central,

speech as a sign of intellect and power in an emerging post-colonial, Creole public sphere. The problem is not that these struggles failed—but that they succeeded—because in the contemporary era one can see this victory reinforced the very 'massa' the society sought to overthrow. To briefly extend this structural analysis, calypso/soca represents colonial/post-colonial, old/young, mind/body, civilized/savage, male/female. The gendering of mas' (masquerade) performance and audience participation in soca music as female during carnival season is commonly asserted in the phrase "carnival is woman".

Although binarisms are useful to describe a general construction of difference, social life is far more complex and dynamic as my analysis shall show. One significant disruption (and a key feature of contemporary globalization), is the double move 'back' to the local, to traditional culture, to fundamentalisms for reasons which are context-bound, but usually concern identity, feelings of security, and cultural commodification. While soca may signal a move towards the 'outside' by incorporating rhythms from American soul music, Jamaican dancehall reggae, and emphasizing international standards of music production, soca music retains and strengthens its Trinidadianness through various musical and lyrical devices. While I can't offer a textual analysis here, examples include "Puwah" by Nigel Lewis, compositions by Machel Montano and Xtatik, among others.

While music-texts are important in soca, I find that soca can most meaningfully be addressed through the subject. My ethnography focuses on where soca is performed, what kind of community the music brings together, what people do at soca events, how the fete generates certain feelings and experiences, and the social meaning of the music, dancing, revelry and so forth. My audience research reveals an extreme contrast in the way soca is publicly represented and its meaning for participants. The press and the older generation condemn soca for having no content or for being "tata" (shit), but young people describe it as an incredible experience of "freeing-up" or "break-away". If the music is labeled "escapist"—I would ask—what is the audience seeking to "escape" from, what are the social conditions that create such intense desire for release?

Some critics label the soca songs 'instructional' or 'command' songs when audiences of 10,000 to 30,000 "jump and wave" together, or

"stomp" in the case of the 1998 Road March winner. This debate goes back to Plato (and is exemplified by the Frankfurt School in the 20th century), in which it is argued that those in control of cultural production completely control the minds and bodies of a passive population. In the Trinidadian context, it also relates to the perceived division between calypso and soca: calypso being of the mind, involving critical reason and gendered male, whereas soca involves the 'unthinking' body, gendered female. However, in life, in work, in the political organization of society we are constantly being instructed, commanded, coerced, educated, socialized, our desires molded (Foucault 1991; Asad 1992; Scott 1995). Judith Butler (1993) describes this as the "regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed," an argument she develops in the notion of "materialization".

In the 'command' socas I see a *competing* form of instruction or 'performativity' and tremendous desire for a new form of sociality—one based on feeling and action, as the realm of words has become dominated by falseness and manipulation, or as David Rudder's "Madman's Rant" suggests, words are propaganda or have been emptied of rational meaning. For soca audiences, the music generates truth in the rhythm, trust in face to face encounter, solidarity among peers, and security in an insecure world. My research clearly indicates that fans don't "jump and wave" at anyone's command, but respond to soca singers they respect as peers and whose authority comes from a lack of social distance. Soca fans also listen carefully to lyrics, especially songs that represent their experience, like the music of Ronnie McIntosh and Machel Montano.

In audience interviews I asked which fetes people attended that season and one young man replied, "Would you believe me if I said all?" This intense desire resonated with my own experience at a number of 'roughneck' fetes. At the National Flour Mills fete it was a chilly rainy night, but like many Trini youth, I started to look forward to the rain, the rain seeming to increase that glorious feeling of abandon, of free-up, of play; the moisture from above adding something divine to the entire event, something to surrender to just as you have to surrender to the crowds at these fetes. Moving towards the front, the temperature rises steadily from sweating, densely packed bodies. But there's a strange sense of intimacy in the crowd, a feeling of warmth and comfort

in the mass. Bass frequencies from the PA system massage my body with subsonic waves in this rapture of soca rhythm and rain—it's a moment I never want to leave...

In the analysis of soca I develop more fully in my dissertation, I discuss a politics of happiness not based in material consumption, and its wider implications for global capitalism. I argue that for youth, carnival season fosters an 'anti-accumulationist ethos'—a time one maximizes the experience of joy to the point of physical exhaustion and exhaustion of all resources. This 'ethos' relates to another theme I label 'immediacy', based in a lack of expectation, 'no-future' mentality, here/hear vs. future promises. The following excerpt, from an audience interview with a 26 year old Afro-Trinidadian male, highlights many of these points and his narrative weaves together the experience of soca with that of poverty, race and generation:

> I have a feeling for soca and dub because of my level of living. Soca raises your pulse and makes you feel so light, like Superblue, it clicks to your mind one time, it's the best! ...once you are in a group with other people like our level, who just love to enjoy yourself—you would catch yourself responding, because calypso {soca} music is so so beautiful, it just captures... it just grabs you! One of my idols is Machel Montano and Xtatik. I kind of judge myself something like him, because he's young, about my age, and the kind of music he puts out it's really really really powerful, I love his music. Anytime you hear its Xtatik—it's a breakaway, you gettin' the best!
>
> *Breakaway?*
>
> ...like lettin' out steam, like a pressure cooker open, like listenin' to the music and you enjoyin' it so much that some people does want to take off their shirt and wave and wave! You just... I'm not saying it's no longer control, it just like... I can't hold back no more! It's just like an explosion, a feelin' yuh just need to let out, a relief... With soca, it makes you forget about whatever negative things happen to you. Normally you don't have money, but carnival, money appearing and you going! I only paid half rent February... but for a black person, don't pull down youself for not having money, we have a way of doing that, but you must never cry down yourself.

Another audience quote from a 23-year old Afro-Trinidadian female, illustrates the important experience and sociality of soca, even at the Caribbean Brass Festival which has become notorious for violence:

> I enjoyed myself at Brass... you don't know if it might be your day to die, but you don't care, you go still. You feel happy, if you under pressure or under stress from work you just go out and relax and enjoy yourself. I go way up in front by the bands, closer to the artists. I enjoy it more in the front, in the front everybody is just jumpin' around and gettin' on, whereas on the outskirts they might be just standing. At the fete you meet people you ain't see for ages, it's like a meeting ground, together with the music. I like dub more than calypso (soca), but during carnival season I all into the calypso.

Dub, Hip Hop and the Politics of Love Songs

Hard times an pain we ah feel
I an I man got to reveal
still we fight among ourselves, kill somebody else
and every day another citizen dead...

> Notes, 2/15/97: This morning I was still in bed when I heard dub rumbling from somewhere nearby. It's the first time I've heard it invading the landscape like that in over a month because of carnival season. It struck me as a reminder, not only of the mass appeal of the music but what it represents, this simmering discontent, covered over by the frenzy of soca and its joyful unconscious... It all began to seem very depressing and even made me angry. What about all the ink spilled on the significance of carnival, and it's only two days, six weeks? What about every other day of the year here?! After all the money's spent, the rum wears off, you wake up thinking what did I just do? And what's different? Like someone said, "Ash Wednesday they go back to they normal self again—pass each other straight on the street..." But that doesn't even capture it—because you don't just 'go back'—you go back knowing *there was something different*. After experiencing social life radically transformed for a moment, a few hours, or even glimpsing that possibility—and then? Normality. Normality set in relief, as "state of emergency" for the oppressed (in Benjamin's words), normality one no longer lived inside, but something visible, horrific...

Contemporary soca music represents one response to deteriorating social conditions for the post-oil 'boom generation', linked to the broader tradition of carnival for the Creole population. The music I discuss in this section, dub (dancehall reggae) and hip hop, dominates the airwaves and lives of young adults the other ten months of the year. Demographically, the audience is still largely black but younger, and broader in terms of race, including large numbers of East Indians—both factors emphasizing generation as the dominant characteristic. I also discuss the immense popularity of American R&B ballads for young women.

In the broader society, Jamaican dancehall music represents the antithesis of "supporting the culture" (national forms like calypso); but a common theme in audience interviews was that dub and hip hop more accurately express everyday life for youth—a world of increasing poverty, crime, and alienation. I explore how adopting a 'foreign' music and aspects of its culture including speech, gestures, ideology, and attitude is a performative way to protest the dominant culture and political policies blamed for increased suffering. Additional questions of social location arise when 'local' cultural production increasingly benefits a particular class and becomes important for revenues from tourism. When a segment of the population becomes excluded from 'their' culture's expressions and profits, it raises questions as to what then constitutes community. Addressing music consumption and its meanings among a socially stratified population disrupts a simplistic view of first world cultural imperialism, while developing a situated analysis of power and oppression.

Dancehall became popular in Trinidad in direct relation to economic decline after the oil boom, leading Jamaican musician Byron Lee to comment, "Dub and recession go hand in hand." In Trinidad, between 1983 and 1989 unemployment rose over 100 percent, the country signed loan agreements with the IMF in 1988 and 1989[7], and 'serious crime' rose in a parallel pattern.[8] Hit hardest by economic decline were youth and women, the 'new poor' as described in World Bank reports on the post-oil boom period. By 1989, alarmist criticism in the press and by older Trinidadians focused on dub as a fearful and corrupting influence on society—it was foreign, obscene, unintelligible noise. Although the lyrics in dancehall music frequently involve a class analysis, the

'noise' is highly significant as well: noise in the sound (as dancehall sounds deliberately jarring and less melodic compared to reggae); and especially social noise, as dancehall represents a "competing ideological system" (Cooper 1998). Or, as Attali (1985) has written, all sounds emitted in society are stakes in games of power.

Making a simple equation between poverty and the popularity of dub would certainly be reductive; suffering will find its expression in forms that relate to situated histories but also draw upon transnational sounds that are not of the 'same place' but evoke an appropriate 'structure of feeling,' be it militant or comforting. In addition to the beat and sound of the music, audience interviews focused on social and material conditions as the reasons these songs are meaningful:

> I think everybody has their own music that says something about themselves. Dub is what our generation listenin' to, this is the music that represents us now. (18-year old female)

> *Do hip hop and dub relate to your experience in Trinidad?*
> I was never into the drug life so I can't really talk about that, but I have been poor all of my life and in hip hop they speak a lot about poverty. They mighn't say "I was poor," but they actually describe their thoughts, their emotions. They speak a lot about depression, and hard times, and wanting to go crazy and shoot up people and all kind of thing, and you mighn't... but a part of you understood exactly where they were coming from. (21-year old male)

In addition to dancehall music, the popularity of R&B ballads among young women also reveals the transformation of cultural space in relation to socio-economic conditions. Slows (as these songs are called in Trinidad), are extremely popular among working class and poor young women across racial lines. Similar to the difference between calypso and soca, very little cultural criticism has focused on ballads compared to the overt 'political' lyrics in some rap, and by comparison, ballads become 'false consciousness' or mass distraction (Gilroy 1994). However, in Trinidad slows are incredibly meaningful to young women in relation to social disintegration and domestic violence, especially with no viable form of organized political struggle at present. In the supposed sanctity of the 'private' sphere, where can women turn for safety and comfort? The audience quotes below are from young women

(and are broadly representative), discussing how slows help them get through the worst times:

> Sometimes music is the only thing to hold onto... it can't talk back.

> Slows are my favorite music, I love Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston. I like the meaning, it's very touching, it makes you think, it helps you to relax. I like R. Kelly, "I Believe I Can Fly," Celine Dion latest "All By Myself." I try to understand these lyrics by writing them down, going through them slowly, playing the cassette over and over... Most women listen to slows, some men do too.
> *What are you most concerned about in Trinidad today?*
> The crime rate in this country scares one to hell, you not safe in your own house. They need to control the prices of food... they laying people off without money.

For many young women, slows are no longer foreign mass commercial product, they're a life-line. With increased crime and social instability, slows represent a constant, reliable source of security. Women relate to female vocalists as a peer and trusted voice for counsel, perhaps more trustworthy than family or friends. Much of the soothing quality occurs in the music itself, in soft tones and rhythms, emotional tension-release achieved through complex chord progressions, soaring vocal lines, and the 'grain of the voice.' Drawing on scholarship in geography and music, slows also produce 'soothing space' as the bedroom becomes a temporary refuge against a larger social assault.

A typical counter-argument would construct these songs as a form of acquiescence or victimization. But a careful analysis of slows reveals these songs are rarely about defeat, and instead foster female empowerment at a time of heightened socio-economic and gender oppression for women. In contrast to the aggressive bravado of male singers in most music genres, in slows like "Last Night" by Az Yet, or "On Bended Knee" by Boyz II Men, the position of power between genders is reversed: men are vulnerable in love, a woman's love becomes necessary for the man's completeness, women hold the power to bestow love, to forgive, or to produce emotional anguish in men. In slows, sexual boasting by male vocalists is usually constructed through the man's ability to please a woman, as opposed to rap and hard rock where

women exist as objects for male pleasure. The popularity of love songs links the violence of structural adjustment policies administered at the international level, with specifically gendered, personal experiences of violence in the 'private' sphere. Slows are indicative of a fundamental contradiction of globalization—as sources of oppression become more complex, diffuse, and unlocatable; people experience oppression in more immediate material, emotional, and intimate spaces. Slows construct a soothing world in which personal relationships embody caring, lasting support and love, something to hold onto beyond any individual or society, a quiet way of surviving the everyday "state of emergency" for the oppressed.

Party Politics: Chutney Soca and Dub among East Indian Youth

"Leadership!!"

The young man behind the keyboards shouts out the unmistakable Beenie Man line, producing a roar of delight from the packed crowd. The band strikes up the opening bars of "Sycamore Tree", a hit by dancehall diva Lady Saw, and the whole dance floor starts to groove. The place is sweaty and packed with over 1,000 people, it's a young crowd with the vast majority under 30 and many in their teens. The guys are dressed in their brands, with Reebok, Nike, and Polo Club shirts carefully untucked over baggy pants. Most have the latest urban hairstyle, while a few sport long hair held back in a pony-tail. The girls are equally "top of the line", many with short hairstyles, wearing short tops and baggy jeans belted at the waist.

The audience is also 95 percent East Indian and this 'chutney soca' event is in celebration of Indian Arrival Day.

The construction of national culture in Trinidad previously only included black forms like calypso, but with the political rise of Indo-Trinidadians this has been contested largely through the promotion of 'chutney'. Chutney is a secular music indigenous to Trinidad but based on Hindu weddings, especially the Matikor, a women-only night of

music and dance which includes references to sexual initiation for the bride (Ramnarine 1997; Riberio 1992; Reddock 1995; Mohammed 1998). Kusha Haraksingh notes the importance of the Saturday cooking night in the development of chutney themes and singing style by men. As a working class phenomenon, chutney has also been met with disapproval by conservative Hindus and elites who prefer that young people learn classical Indian music and dance. Male musicians and female dancers predominate in public performances of chutney; and professional female dancers negotiate being acceptably sexy and unacceptably sexual in their movements. In the audience, women and men usually dance in same-sex groups, and chutney is most popular for Indians over age 30. In many ways, chutney and calypso parallel chutney soca and soca music in terms of generation.

While chutney soca shows have become a mass phenomenon which some describe as an 'Indian Renaissance' in Trinidad, my ethnographic research raises questions about how 'Indian' these shows are (implied by the opening description of Dil-E-Nadaan's performance in May 1997). One of the most popular venues, D Triangle, which functions as a nightclub and cultural center, draws crowds of 500–1500 people to its chutney soca shows every Sunday. Youth are the largest age demographic, and in terms of race the shows are approximately 95 percent Indian. The most popular bands among youth are the 'crossover' bands like JMC Triveni and Dil-E-Nadaan. Dil-E-Nadaan performs Indian film and pop hits, and a significant amount of reggae and soca songs. The greatest shouts of excitement from the audience occur when the DJ spins after the band, with selections that include almost no Indo-Trinidadian music. The music is largely dancehall reggae, soca hits from carnival season, and two or three bhangra songs (a genre which has recently become popular). I asked one young fan why they played so much dub at a chutney show and she just laughed, saying, "if they didn't the youths would pelt!"

This general description of a chutney soca show introduces a number of key themes in the popularity of these events for East Indian youth, as discussed in audience interviews: the importance of variety in song selection, especially dub and soca; the modern electric sound over traditional Indian music with acoustic instruments; bands and DJs over individual chutney performers; songs in English over Hindi; lyrics about

contemporary youth concerns over the experiences of an older generation; chutney soca over traditional chutney because of it's fusion with the soca beat, pumped-up bass, and contemporary production values; more heterosexual dancing (in the dominant Creole form of wining), over traditional chutney danced in same-sex groups. There's also more racial mixing, however slight, much of which has to do with the entire experience at these shows being more contemporary, generationally defined, and part of global youth culture in terms of language, musical elements, clothing style, dancing and so forth. However, a crucial point about the non-Indian elements at these shows is that it's an Indian band, an Indian audience, and an Indian-defined space.[9]

But this raises another question—if there's so much 'black music' at 'Indian' shows, why don't Afro-Trinidadians with the same musical preferences attend—why are these spaces so demarcated by race? My preliminary analysis points to a few factors. While there are cross-cutting cultural influences through the expansion of media nationally and transnationally—the country is still divided geographically, and through informal forms of segregation elaborated in social values and a segmented labor force. In addition, one study shows that residential proximity doesn't lead to intermarriage in Trinidad because of the "general influence of group socialization" (Clarke 1993). Patronage by racially divided political parties fuels this spatial and social separation, and parents exercise tremendous influence as well. In an interview I conducted with an 18-year old Indo-Trinidadian woman as part of my chutney audience research, she mentioned having a "Negro boyfriend" and that she had just been in an argument with her disapproving father. She feels that Trinidadians are too "racial" and that parents have "too much control." The challenging of gender roles and race-based family structure must also be read in the context of neoliberalism which fosters freely-choosing, autonomous subjects.

However, chutney soca shows also express public cultural pride which parallels the political movement of Indians into the mainstream (and illustrates the tendency in globalization toward cultural entrenchment). One university professor commented on the rise in consciousness, acceptance of Indian culture and its public visibility, compared to twenty years ago when East Indians were considered

'second-class citizens' and would feel ashamed to eat roti on the street. (Now everyone eats this popular food in public). In one audience survey, a 19-year old Indian male listed Triveni (chutney soca), Xtatik (soca) and Green Day (popular U.S. pop-punk band) as his favorite groups. In the interview he connected his recent enthusiasm for chutney to the modernization of the music and not feeling ashamed:

> *What's the most popular music with Indian youth?*
> Chutney music. A couple years ago I used to feel ashamed to associate with Indian music, but now I see more and more young people, and people of other races going to the shows and enjoying iit.
> *Why did you feel ashamed before?*
> Well back in them times, with the traditional classical, with the older people... to see a younger person involved with it—you just don't fit in... But now, as soon as they start introducing brass and soca into the chutney music, more and more people getting involved. Soca chutney, where they singin' in English I could understand the lyrics, but traditional chutney I don't understand it.
> *Tell me about being at a show...*
> In the second half when the tempo kick in we does really dance and get on. With the use of rhythm machines in the orchestra now they have a drum beat that just make you want to dance. And other than that, the brass now, when calypso playin' you know they tell yuh move to the left and move to the right, hands up hands down, like that? That is what we like, we just love those songs, I like the ones that get everyone involved and I like to see people dancin' to the songs.

Raymond Ramnarine of Dil-E-Nadaan also discussed the importance of being a young performer for the youth audience, and the variety of music:

> *Are more young people interested in the Indian bands now?*
> Yes, by me coming out there (I started singing at 15), it was a big influence on the younger folks, because they look at me on stage—'look at that guy he's a young guy and he's out there doing this and he's not ashamed of his culture, why should we be ashamed of it?' To be honest, the percentage of youths coming to shows now is a big big difference, because long ago you had people coming out but it was more the middle-aged and older folks, but now you get the younger folks coming out—why?—because of the variety

of the music and the influence that me and my brothers have had.
You guys seem like the "Xtatik" of Indian music...
Yeah man! Well, you know Xtatik mash it up on the soca side, they young and they have the energy, so they takin' charge of that side and we takin' charge of this side!

The Unforgiven: Rock, Metal and Alternative

While the three sections above are very different from each other, all have a high degree of internal consistency especially with regard to race. But the rock scene in Trinidad is two distinct groups that come together at big shows and listen to Luis Hart's show on Radio 95 on Friday nights—but otherwise occupy very different worlds. One group is mainly white and mixed, middle class and above, from the North and West; the other is largely working class Indians, many from Central and South. However, both groups discuss rock music in similar ways, emphasizing the music itself, the instrumental playing, soloing, and personal expression of the medium. Many fans play in bands (unlike other music genres in Trinidad), and are highly knowledgeable about music on a technical level. My surveying also indicates these fans are the most faithful to their music (which might also be read as single-minded or marginalized). Fans across racial lines are attracted to a truth in the music which they oppose to the falseness of society—being real and not a sell-out or fake is of utmost importance.

Racial divisions are most evident in performance spaces and in the levels of press coverage given white bands as opposed to Indian bands. While coming from very different racial and class positions, both groups' interest in rock signals a deliberate distancing from the dominant Creole culture in Trinidad. The distancing by whites is reinforced not only by living in isolated communities, but by living in the *virtual* communities of MTV and the internet through which they the communicate with other rock and alternative fans in the U.S. and Europe. Interestingly, East Indian metal fans have similar characteristics to their white counterparts in the States, who are largely working class kids with little prospect of social mobility.

In an interview with an 18-year old white rock fan from Westmoorings, an affluent area in Trinidad, he discussed his musical interests in relation to race, class, and fear:

There's different groups of people who listen to rock in this country. Mainly those down South are very much into metal, a lot of Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, a lot of death metal. Whereas in the West, there are people that are into that type of music as well, but among the white people in this country you get the surfers that listen to a lot of punk, which you would find a lot of people in California listening to as well. But a lot of the angst and desperation is being forced...like when Kurt Cobain died. I never found I could understand all of the frustration that was being portrayed in his music.. maybe at certain times, if I was feeling real depressed I could identify with some of it, but I found it was overblown.
Has cable had a big impact?
Yeah it has. A lot of what people find out about is through MTV. And you find out a lot through the internet, you meet people, and they could tell you I like this band it's real cool...
What do you think about the nightclub discrimination?
I agree with that totally. I understand that a lot of people get braced at these clubs every night that shouldn't get braced... but the problem is, that white people in this country are not safe. I would not mind going to the Fugees concert, but it would be unsafe for me, because I am white. Having white skin in this country you are put under a label that you are rich, snobby, upper-class, you have money on you... the chances of me getting robbed are *so high*. Even getting ready to come here (to St. James) I was studying whether to put on this ring or not...

In a radical shift of scene...

During an interview I did with Julie, a chronically unemployed member of the East Indian heavy metal subculture in Trinidad, she suddenly launched into very personal details of her life. Julie told me about being beaten repeatedly by her father, she's also been raped three times and has had two illegal abortions. An Indo-Trinidadian woman in her mid-20s, she's been trying to leave the country for several years to live with her boyfriend who left Trinidad to work in a factory in New York. Julie doesn't have a job or the necessary savings required for a visa so she has to live at home—with her father. Her father listens to East Indian music on the radio, but the walls in Julie's bedroom are

covered with posters of hard rock and metal bands. She listens to rock music all the time, she told me she likes the noise.

We became friends and one night went to lime at Park Place, an Indian metal pub in Chaguanas (Central Trinidad). Park Place is smallish, painted black inside, with worn-out booths lining the walls. Most people liming were Indian men, like one guy with long black hair hanging down over massive tattooed shoulders, a ripped Iron Maiden shirt, black jeans, and heavy boots. The music was really loud, mostly Metallica, Cinderella, Bon Jovi and everyone was drinking heavily. Suddenly, the whole place gave a shout as "Enter the Sandman" by Metallica blasted out of the speakers and two or three guys jumped into the center of the floor headbanging and playing air guitar.

Sitting in Park Place was definitely like being... somewhere else. It was a visual and sonic erasure of everything 'Trinidadian', especially Creole culture, but Indian culture too. I did talk to one person who said he also likes chutney, but Julie scoffed and said she hates it–she's a true rocker. Everyone I spoke with had the same sort of dead-end jobs... an auto mechanic, a person who worked on a shrimp boat, a factory worker. With the opening riff of Bon Jovi's "Going Down in a Blaze of Glory", Julie leaned over and told me, "when I die I would like this music to be played, I want to be burned so nobody could visit my grave. Some people say they want to come back as a bird or another human being, but I when I die I don't want to come back."

> What I've felt
> What I've known
> Never shined through in what I've shown
> Never free
> Never me
> So I dub thee unforgiven
>
> You labelled me
> I'll label you
> So I dub thee unforgiven
> *The Unforgiven*, Metallica

Conclusion

I've admittedly condensed many complex experiences and issues in this paper, and will draw a few conclusions. In the independence period, the nation-state was the ground of political and cultural struggle (reflected in the calypso tradition), but in the contemporary era contestation has shifted to sub-state and transnational levels. Allegiances to different genres of music by populations differently-positioned by race and class, reveal how global processes transform social identity, inequality, and sites of conflict. Among Trinidadian music audiences, race is the greatest marker of difference because public discourse on 'race' is politically useful, and 'racial difference' also embodies historically-constituted struggles and segmented access to resources. At the same time, soca and black diasporic musics like Jamaican dancehall and American R&B are highly popular among all youth—pointing to another social geography defined by post-colonial disillusionment and class polarization:

> ...it's not a black thing it's not a white thing, there are poor people all over the world, we have a global ghetto culture... a lot of poor people believe to themselves that this is the way it's going to always be and that is it. I believe basically that it's not up to the politicians, I doh care about the politicians really and truly...but I care about my people. (21-year old black male)

Yúdice (1994) and Scott (1997) have shown how the cultural politics of youth music represent the disarticulation of national culture and citizenry; rejecting the liberal-nationalist project and its terms of participation occurs because there is no longer a real or imagined connection between cultural representation and access to social and material goods and services. However, it's crucial to account for the fact that music audiences in Trinidad demonstrate a movement towards foreign music *and* indigenous cultural forms. This contradiction arises from a sense of increased instability in the new world order, in which the very forces of globalization produce a counter-tendency towards locality, a clinging—if you will—to immediate place-based relationships of family and community. Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian youth contend with diminished resources by exhibiting contradictory

allegiances to traditional race and gender identity, and at the same time evade traditional culture through associations with foreign music. For middle and upper class youth, access to transnational media and the internet provide another 'location' to inhabit. Some common threads among these divergent groups include a mistrust of speech at a national level, a desire for truth in the sound and feeling, and the believability of peers. Many dub songs, soca, R&B and rock speak directly to youth, from dub's emphasis on generation and class analysis to the great disdain for the dominant culture evident in metal. Soca fans also feel that the music speaks directly to their experience.

In conclusion, music and musically defined spaces are highly marked by class, race and age, and become sites of struggle in the post-oil boom economy—both for access to a shrinking middle-class space and as sonically signified rejection of place. For many young Trinidadians, noise is employed as interference and sound defines a community being redrawn by the critical articulation of place and globalizing processes. The increase in East Indian sounds represents shifting power relations at a national level; while reterritorializing the landscape with sounds from other places often expresses a common experience of poverty, as in dub and rap; or the desire for a better life associated with U.S. cultural hegemony and whiteness in the form of rock music. At the same time, local forms of music remain highly popular as culture becomes more meaningful in the context of globalization (and 'culture' has increased value as a commodity and for national politics). An analysis of music as social/spatial practice provides a way of addressing these multiple articulations of power, as cultural politics are defined as much by the history of this place, as the current generation's experience of disjuncture with it.

Notes

1. Keith Smith, senior editor, *Trinidad Express*.
2. Poverty indexes are figured and interpreted differently in various reports. One survey by the Ministry of Social Development in 1992 rates 36 percent of households poor. The World Bank identified 21percent of the population as poor, with 11 percent extremely poor. Both surveys generally agree on the distribution of poverty, that it is only significant among the dominant ethnic groups (African and Indian), and poverty is highest in the San Juan/Laventille area (largely African). Structural adjustment also reduced basic social services like education and health care. While poverty in Trinidad is relatively low compared to other Caribbean and Latin American countries, the dramatic economic decline after the oil boom meant that in less than a decade one third of the population had fallen into poverty, the "new poor" primarily youth and women.
3. 1991 data from a survey conducted by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI, Trinidad. 1990 census data from the Trinidad and Tobago Statistical Office indicates a slightly higher percentage mixed (18 percent), and slightly less of "African" and "Indian" descent.
4. For a more detailed explanation of my approach to meaning and politics in music (especially beyond analyses of lyrics), see Balliger 1995.
5. See my dissertation, tentatively titled, *Noisy Spaces: Popular Music, Youth, and the Cultural Politics of Globalization in Trinidad*, (forthcoming 1999).
6. I counted over 150 articles and letters to the editor in the two major dailies alone. See also, McCree 1997.
7. Dennis Pantin. *Into the Valley of Debt*. UWI, 1989.
8. *Report on Crime Statistics 1995*. Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago.
9. Cultural critic and *Express* columnist, Burton Sankeralli, has written extensively on the redefinition of cultural and ethnic space in "post-Creole" Trinidad.

References

Appadurai, Arjun (1990) Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture* 2:22

Asad, Talal (1992) Conscripts of Western Civilization. In *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond;* ed. Christine Ward Gailey. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Attali, Jacques (1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Balliger, Robin (1995) The Sounds of Resistance. In *Sounding Off!: Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*, eds. Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-Han Ho. New York: Autonomedia.

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Switzerland: Gordon and Breach.

Butler, Judith (1993) *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge.

Clarke, Colin (1993) Spatial Pattern and Social Interaction among Creoles and Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. In *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. Kevin Yelvington. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

Cooper, Carolyn (1998) Border Clash: The Politics of Location in Jamaican Popular Culture. Paper presented at African Diaspora Conference, University of California, Berkeley.

Crichton, Noel and Charles de Silva (1989) Financial Development and Economic Growth: Trinidad and Tobago, 1973-1987. *Social and Economic Studies* 38:4

Dirlik, Arif (1994) *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism*. Hanover:Wesleyan University Press.

Dookeran, Winston C., ed. (1996) *Choices and Change: Reflections on the Caribbean*. New York: Inter-American Development Bank.

Dunn, Hopeton S., ed. (1995) *Globalization, Communications and Caribbean Identity*. Kingston: Ian Randle.

Foucault, Michel (1991) Governmentality. In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gilroy, Paul (1991) *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. (1994) 'After the love has gone': Bio-politics and Etho-poetics in the Black Public Sphere. *Public Culture* 7:49-76.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan, eds. (1994) *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gross, Joan, David McMurray, and Ted Swedenburg (1994) Arab Noise and Ramadan Nights: Rai, Rap and Franco-Maghrebi Identity. *Diaspora* 3:1

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (1992) Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. *Cultural Anthropology* 7:1

Harvey, David (1992) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Hill, Donald (1993) *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad*. Florida: University of Florida.

hooks, bell (1993) The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators. In *Black American Cinema*. Manthia Diawara, ed. London: Routledge.

Keith, Michael and Steve Pile, ed. (1993) *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge.

La Guerre, John, ed. (1994) *Structural Adjustment: Public Policy and Administration in the Caribbean*. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Lipsitz, George (1994) *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*. London: Verso.

Liverpool, Hollis (1990) *Kaiso and Society*. Trinidad: Juba Publications.

Lowe, Lisa and David Lloyd, ed. (1997) *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mankekar, Purnima (1993) National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City. *American Ethnologist* 20:3

McCree, Roy Dereck (1997) Ethnic Cleansing and Ethnic Dancing: Jamming Racism, Unity and Identity in the Contemporary Caribbean. Paper presented at the Caribbean Studies Association 22nd Conference,May 26-30,1997,Barranquilla, Columbia.

Mohammed, Shamoon (1998) Personal communication with author.

Premdas, Ralph (1993) *The Enigma of Ethnicity: An Analysis of Race in the Caribbean and the World*. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

———. (1998) Identity in an Ethnically Bifurcated State: Trinidad and Tobago. In *The Shaping of Ethnonational Identities*. London: McMillan.

Radway, Janice (1991) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

Ramnarine, Tina K. (1997) Historiographic and Methodological Problems in Tracing the Origins of Contemporary Indian-Caribbean Music. *Natrang*, vol. 1:10

Rampersad, Frank, ed. (1997) *The New World Trade Order: Uruguay Round Agreements and Implications for CARICOM States*. Mona: Ian Randle and Institute for Social and Economic Studies, UWI.

Reddock, Rhoda (1995) Contestations over National Culture in Trinidad and Tobago: Considerations of Ethnicity, Class and Gender. In *Contemporary Issues in Social Science: A Caribbean Perspective*, Vol. 2. Ed. Ramesh Deosaran and Nasser Mustapha. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Riberio, Indra (1992) The Phenomenon of Chutney Singing in Trinidad and Tobago—The Functional Value of a Social Phenomenon. B.A. Thesis, University of the West Indies.

Rohlehr, Gordon (1990) *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Ryan, Selwyn, ed. (1988) *The Independence Experience 1962-1987*. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Sampath, Niels M. (1993) An Evaluation of the 'Creolisation' of Trinidad East Indian Adolescent Masculinity. In *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. Kevin Yelvington. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

Scott, David (1995) *Colonial Governmentality*. Social Text 43.

———. (1997) 'Wi a di Govament': An Interview with Anthony B. *Small Axe* 2:79-101.

Stolcke, Verena (1995) Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe. *Current Anthropology*. 36:1

Surlin, Stuart H. and Walter C. Soderlund, ed. (1990) *Mass Media and the Caribbean*. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Verdery, Kathleen (1996) Nationalism, Postsocialism, and Space in Eastern Europe. *Social Research* 63:1

Warner, Keith (1983) *The Trinidad Calypso*. London: Heinemann.

World Bank (1995) *Trinidad and Tobago: Poverty and Unemployment in an Oil Based Economy*. Report no.14382 - TF (Oct.27,1995).

Yelvington, Kevin, ed. (1993) *Trinidad Ethnicity*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Yúdice, George (1994) The Funkification of Rio. In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, ed. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose. New York: Routledge.