Photo by Georgia Popplewell: Cobo Town masquerade

Vultures Invade Trinidad!:

Spectacular Urban Development and Artist Activism in a Neoliberal Cultural Economy

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The possession and ownership of land, nation, or even the self, has been a persistent and troubling theme in Caribbean societies due to the historical context of slavery, indenture, and colonial domination among a diasporic population.[1] During frequent walks I took in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in the late-1990s, this sense of dispossession manifested in the built environment through a sense of disinterest. Across from Parliament, a beautiful colonial-era

building stood in a state of ruin from a bombing in a 1990 coup attempt. The largest buildings in Port of Spain were the Twin Towers, constructed in the early 1980s as a monument to the oil boom of 1974-1982. Their modernist design seemed homage to the industrializing independent nation, as the dark steel girders that criss-cross the entire exterior appear to enclose the building in symbolic sovereignty. A few blocks away, in the Queen's Park Savannah, the primary venue for annual Carnival celebrations was little more than an open-air grandstand providing minimal cover from sun and rain. However, every Carnival season the Savannah revealed itself as the ideal performance space for the unparalleled burst of energy, color, sound, and movement produced by thousands of masqueraders and by hundred-player steelbands for which Trinidad is world-renowned.

A walk through Port of Spain in 2010 produced a radically contrasting experience. Curving blue-glass skyscrapers gracefully stroke the Caribbean sky; the mirrored-glass exteriors suggest seamless accessibility for those privileged enough to ascend. By comparison, the barely noticeable Twin Towers look dark and antiquated. The deafening sound of jackhammers and construction equipment echoes with non-stop urgency from behind construction fences along the Brian Lara Promenade (formerly Independence Square). At one end of the Promenade, the Waterfront Project hosts a gleaming, elegantly designed Hyatt Regency, completed to accommodate the comfort and security needs of international visitors, especially during two recent political summits hosted by the government (Commonwealth Heads of Government and the Summit of the Americas, which included Barack Obama). In fact, the positioning of the hotel itself can function as a blockade, obstructing the ocean and private docks from everyday citizens, and from the homeless who congregate in its shadow -- their displaced presence haunting such spectacular ambitions. Dispossession now has a neoliberal sheen.

These spatial transformations provide visible evidence of less obvious -- but equally monumental -- societal changes that have occurred in Trinidad since 2000. Unlike most of the Caribbean region, Trinidad's economy and governance strategies emerge from its status as an energy-based economy or 'rentier state,' but national energy revenues have been deployed in historically specific ways. Following independence in 1962, patronage-based governance functioned through a strategy of redistribution in an expanded public sector, but in the neoliberal era the distribution of wealth has shifted away from the public, concentrating in the upper-middle classes nationally and among multinationals in the energy sector. Even as poverty and homicides are at record levels, the neoliberal state in Trinidad has amassed wealth from oil and natural gas production, and the government aims to position the country as a regional and hemispheric leader. The government's *2020 Vision* specifically intends to attain "First World" status through development, and the plan articulates unprecedented interest in visible status through cultural and architectural achievement. Attracting foreign investment and meeting the expectations of a transnational managerial class has necessitated the symbolic rebranding of the country, and the state's most iconic urban development project is the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA).

In this talk, I explore the ways in which the cultural sphere in Trinidad has been repositioned to communicate 'global' status through arts-related urban development projects, and how artist-activists are challenging these changes. The Trinidadian state's relationship to artists has been characterized by neglect for decades (Balliger 2001, 2012), but state development projects in the cultural sphere have galvanized national artists from multiple practices and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. While the interests of various artists will never exist in absolute opposition or conformity to state projects, my research suggests that systems of cultural value at

different scales may easily conflict, as the spectacular expression of culture designed for international display may not correspond to the social orientation and historical particularity of the national artistic community. These dissonant interests have thrust Trinidadian artists into the forefront of activism in recent years, as artists have demonstrated opposition to state projects through political organizing and in their artistic practices. In addition to analyzing the content of these practices, my research centers on the structural position of artists in a neoliberal cultural economy—particularly the ways in which a new vision of global status through cultural distinction paradoxically reveals the state's dependence on national artists.

My research in Trinidad spans more than fifteen years, and my current ethnography focuses on three recent areas of arts activism in Trinidad. The first centers on the formation of an umbrella organization entitled Artist's Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) which has publicly criticized the exclusion of national artists from the state's development of a multi-million dollar performing arts complex (NAPA). The second focuses on a masquerade group that re-politicized Trinidad's 2010 Carnival. Through the "ole mas" imagery of the vulture, "Cobo Town" protested the 'state' of social decay, particularly the gross inequality occurring between a state bloated with petrodollars and a 50% poverty rate. Finally, I analyze social media platforms that have been employed to widely circulate these commentaries, protests, and performances, including a number of creative video collage pieces on YouTube. These highly visual and vocal denunciations of state authority contributed to the downfall of the People's National Movement (PNM) government in the election of May 2010. Beyond celebrating an important political victory for artists and citizens in Trinidad, these events contribute to broader understandings of cultural workers in neoliberal conditions. Through their creative practices, Trinidadian artists materialized fearful entities such as vultures and the "resource curse," which

effectively fostered broad public engagement on the changing relationship between citizens and the state.

Artists and the Politics of Sign Value

At the current height of spectacular capitalism, and consumption as a major problem in macroeconomics, it is ironic that artists as *subjects* in a neoliberal cultural economy should receive scant attention in social science fields. While it has become obvious that we live in an increasingly image-dominated world -- even in radically different global contexts -- theorists often elide the material and imaginative work of artists in the production of, and struggle over, the meanings of national and global environments. Some theorists tout the importance of the "creative class" in the global economy today (Florida 2008, 2002), but artists exist in all classes and have multiple orientations. Here, I define artists broadly as those with specific talents in visual, aural, and performance domains whose work may be in the fine arts, popular culture, or commercial fields; the meanings of such practices vary widely, including radical political agendas, nationalism, intimate expression, personal aggrandizement, the production of desire and fetishism in commercial imagery, etc., (in fact, artistic practice typically encompasses a messy combination of these seemingly discrete domains).

This paper explores the political implications of artists as cultural workers essential to the materializing of national distinction; I focus specifically on Trinidadian artists as subjects and on their contemporary relation to capital in a postcolonial 'global city' context. In the last ten years, the arts have played an increasing public-policy role in urban regeneration strategies worldwide, the 'creative class' has been identified as essential for attracting innovative entrepreneurial activity to cities, and neoliberal states emphasize the cultural sphere as a "resource" for creating

a business environment most attractive to foreign capital in order to attain global city status internationally (Canclini 2002; Smith 2002; Florida 2002, 2008; Yúdice 2003; Peck 2005; Cameron and Coagee 2005; Sassen 2006b; Dávila 2008).[2] The symbolic economy intertwines cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital essential for branding the nation or city, as cities that aim for global status increase their sign value through strategies of cultural innovation, including the franchising of museums like the Guggenheim (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). In these contexts, culture also becomes a powerful instrument of urban governance as redevelopment projects and images symbolize who belongs in specific places (McDonough 2003; Zukin 2008).

Saskia Sassen's work on global cities also emphasizes the "cultural turning of cities," but she argues for the "place-boundedness" of neoliberal capitalism and how global cities that facilitate the upper circuits of capital require diverse laborers, including artists (2001, 2006a, 2006b). However, much of the scholarship on global cities rarely accounts for the subject positions of artists themselves, and their potentially weak integration into elite global city schemes. During the last decade in Trinidad, in unprecedented ways, the state has financed spectacular urban development projects designed to communicate global status, but many artists oppose the spectacle of national culture deployed by the state, and instead insist on a meaning of the nation that emerges from historically lived culture. The contemporary struggle over national cultural space in Trinidad parallels questions of resource ownership, which I discuss below.

Unnecessary Citizens and the "Resource Curse"

As a resource-rich nation-state, Trinidad's economic and cultural history closely parallels the story of global oil since the early 20th century. The steel pan, or steel drum, was crafted from oil drums in Trinidad and the "pan" is considered the most significant acoustic instrument

invented in the twentieth century. Steel bands are located in neighborhoods throughout Trinidad; the spatial organization of "pan yards" builds localized community through rehearsals, parties, and fundraisers, as everyone in the neighborhood is welcome to participate or 'lime' (hang out). Moreover, calypso music emerged under colonialism in Trinidad and these songs of topical social commentary circulated like an underground newspaper to provide alternative versions of events.[3] In the context of socialist organizing in the 1930s, an oil worker and labor activist named "Buzz" Butler led a wildcat strike that resulted in the extreme use of force by the government. Calypso songs like "Commission's Report," by Atilla, defended Butler and used satire to criticize colonial authority (see one verse below):

> A peculiar thing of this Commission
> In their ninety-two lines of dissertation
> Is there is no talk of exploitation
> Of the worker or his tragic condition
> Read through the pages there is no mention
> Of capitalistic oppression
> Which leads one to entertain a thought
> And wonder if it's a one-sided report

For resource-rich economies like Trinidad, the privatizing impetus of neoliberalism manifests in the articulation between state energy production and global energy interests.[4] It's critical to understand the stark contrast in the ways that energy revenues were distributed in quasi-socialist governance strategies of the postcolonial state in Trinidad from the 1970s through early 1980s, compared with the neoliberal concentration of energy profits among multinational corporations and national elites since 2000. During the oil boom of 1974-1982 poverty was only 3% in Trinidad, but after the oil boom, declining revenues led to borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF); by 1992 poverty had increased to 36% and the "new poor" were identified as youth and women (World Bank 1995). The contraction of the public sector

began to affect political loyalty, since the two major political parties in Trinidad have traditionally relied on racially differentiated patronage (between citizens of African and Indian descent). Over the last decade, however, Trinidad's energy-based economy has thrived and the country has a relatively high GDP ($21,200 per capita in 2010), comparable to Czech Republic and South Korea. Importantly, however, these statistics obfuscate the *distribution* of wealth, as poverty has risen dramatically even as the state and national elites have prospered. A UNDP Report from 2004 reported 51% poverty, with 39% living daily on less than US $2 and 12% on less than US $1 (Verrest and Reddock 2004). The polarization of wealth, along the neoliberal state's lack of commitment to create employment and to alleviate poverty, has not only created extreme hardship, but has radically disarticulated citizens from state interests.

Besides benefiting from higher oil prices in the last decade, Trinidad has become a major exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Atlantic LNG, a joint venture company, began producing liquefied natural gas in 1999 and Trinidad is currently a major supplier of LNG to the U.S. Atlantic LNG is the most privatized of all major producers worldwide with only 10% owned by Trinidad's National Gas Company (Shepherd and Ball 2004). LNG production requires very little labor after the construction phase, and an Inter-Development Bank Report describes Trinidad as a "dual economy" because of economic growth concentrated in the energy sector and *contraction* of the non-energy tradable sector (known in economics as the "natural resource curse"); the energy sector in Trinidad accounts for 80% of exports but only 5% of employment. In sum, petro-capitalism in the context of market liberalization provides few social returns in education and labor; other negative socio-economic indicators include a significant rise in infant mortality, while reductions in the agricultural sector have raised questions of food accessibility for the poorest Trinidadians.[5]

At first look, Trinidad's consistent record of democractic process since independence would seem to have little in common with the more extreme profiteering, authoritarian politics, and violence occurring in oil-rich states like Nigeria and Angola. However, Trinidadian society may be moving in this direction given the escalating murder rate, which is fueled by the socially thin model of enclave extraction, as resource profits flow largely to transnational corporations not the national populace. This radical shift in class structure and economic organization has had a profound impact on social relations in the entire country. Many aspects of life in Trinidad, including the major cultural festival of Carnival, have functioned well over the years because of a fairly low poverty rate and a substantial middle class, which facilitated a relatively safe public cultural environment. As I discuss below, the cultural sphere has become an increasingly contested space, vividly revealing discrepant interests between the neoliberal state and national community of artists.

Warning -- If You Build It, They Might Come!

During the last decade in Trinidad, the extraction economy has financed spectacular state development projects that are putatively for the public, but these projects actually represent the disembedding of downtown Port of Spain from the space of the nation. The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT) has been the primary institutional agent of spatial transformation in Trinidad. UDeCOTT specializes in project management and the limited liability Corporation is the state's primary urban developer. Among the Corporation's impressive list of current projects, the vast majority are high-end entertainment, arts, and state administrative buildings with almost no development of housing or infrastructure benefiting the wider population.

The newly constructed National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA), an 800-million dollar development project, epitomizes the state's recent interest in the cultural sphere. NAPA was completed in 2009, and it is considered the most innovative architectural structure in the country. During fieldwork I conducted in late 2009, many working-class Trinidadians I spoke with felt proud of this architectural achievement; they found the design to be beautiful and to resonate with other renowned sports and arts facilities internationally. The nested series of glass arches was often compared with Sydney's famous opera house. The attention to architecture in this case also marks a significant change in attitude; the built environment has not been particularly emphasized in Trinidad, as ambivalence towards territory lingers from the historical injuries of colonization, slavery, and indenture. No working-class citizen I knew of had attended any events at NAPA, nor had they been inside, and yet the building contributed to a positive sense of national identification through visual spectacle.

Among the arts community in Trinidad, a very different narrative emerged about this project. In fact, the National Academy of Performing Arts became a flashpoint for debate about

the relationship between culture and the state, raising profound questions about 'public sector' development projects that have little tangible relation to indigenous cultural producers. Specifically, the government hired foreign architects to design NAPA with literally no input at any stage of the project from Trinidadian nationals (artists, architects, urban planners, etc.). The building was constructed with immigrant Chinese labor (even though unemployment and poverty in Trinidad are at record high levels). These factors alone might alienate Trinidadian artists from the project, but many artists remained optimistic, since NAPA seemed to represent a positive change in attitude towards investment in the arts, and the center still held the promise of their participation.

However, the real "tragedy" of NAPA became apparent when Trinidadian artists were finally invited to view the facility and they realized that the space would be nearly useless for national performance styles, because it was modeled on European theatrical norms and even then included many design flaws. Rubadiri Victor, President of The Artists Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT), released a detailed report summarizing problems with the building, entitled "The Tragedy and The Hidden History of NAPA." It begins with "The Sorrowful Tour":

> On Sunday 17th January 2010 4 generations of theatre and dance practitioners gathered at the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) for a seminar entitled *The Way Forward* – part of this exercise involved a tour of the NAPA facility for the first time by the stakeholders who are supposed to be its most important tenants. What followed was one of the saddest journeys that many of us have ever embarked on. What should have been a tour full of wonder and joy upon revelation instead was more like the sorrow of a 2nd generation Jew visiting a concentration camp (2010:1).

The report analyzes flaws with the building in excruciating detail for thirty pages -- including a possibly ill-laid foundation, poor quality steel, no loading area for the main stage,

seating for only 1400 people in the main theater (when it should have been designed for 5000 as an appropriate break-even point for the largest productions), two smaller theaters are only empty rooms with no seating, all light and sound boards are labeled in Chinese with no English translations, there are no dressing rooms close to the main stage and no showers, the dance studios have unsuitable flooring (often in concrete), and so on. The title of the report's point number ten engaged in some dark humor, "Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here: The orchestra pit for NAPA is a stunning one story drop off the stage." The report also debates the external stylistic aesthetics of the building:

> The fact is that there is no other building like NAPA in Trinidad. It ambitiously strives for what artists and architects have lobbied the government to do for 46 years – create signature buildings for the Arts. But ambition and size do not make a thing beautiful… The reaction to NAPA has varied. The fact remains that many citizens – bludgeoned by years of ugly, un-ambitious local buildings – have actually voiced approval for NAPA's structure. Most of the population like how NAPA looks, are clueless for what it is for, but presume it will work…. Yet there is a section of the populace that finds the structure intrusive, out of proportion with the site, and stylistically out of whack with the architectural landscape….One senior artist has gone on record calling its design "copulating slugs". This section of the public has found that NAPA looks more like a foreign imposition that does not mirror or draw inspiration imaginatively and stylistically from any precedent in the landscape. To them NAPA squats like an alien on the landscape. Albeit a shiny one (2010:3).

When I spoke with Rubadiri Victor, he mentioned that as ACTT's questioning of UDeCOTT's actions attracted more publicity, charges of corruption began to emerge and some government officials began to feel threatened.[6] In fact, Victor presented his analysis of NAPA in hearings and press conferences only to have his laptop stolen twice following his appearances. But the Coalition's critique of NAPA has been effective, prompting the Urban Development Corporation to publish defensive articles on their webpage, including "Setting the Record Straight." Importantly, by foregrounding the disjuncture between state interests and the interests

of the arts community, Trinidadian artist-activists have radically resignified this development project. Rather than monumentalizing the neoliberal state in its quest for global status through artistic and architectural spectacle, NAPA occupies the urban landscape like a wound, signifying the abuse of state power, squandered public resources, and a tragic loss for the national arts community in Trinidad.

Photo by Georgia Popplewell

Cobo Town and the Return of Ole Mas

Vampires reign in American popular culture today and vultures are a pertinent symbol of late-global capitalism, particularly in relation to extraction economies. For Marx, accumulation in industrial capitalism was "vampire-like" as it thrived by "sucking living labor," but a group of masqueraders called "Cobo Town" in Trinidad's 2010 carnival draw on the image of the vulture (or *corbeau*) to suggest that neoliberal capitalism thrives off the dead. Energy profits have dramatically increased Trinidad's GDP since 2000, but in the same period homicides have risen

six-fold. The homicide rate is up from an historical high of 100 in 2006, to an alarming 600 murders in 2009. Guns and gangs have become the only survival strategies for many poor youth and some Trinidadians claim there are neighborhoods with no young men alive between the ages of 15-25. The image of the vulture powerfully re-articulates the wealth of the neoliberal state with the decaying social body in Trinidad, thus foregrounding the doubleness of masquerade as grassroots Carnival performance and as a tactic of the neoliberal state as it stages its representation of the national public through visual strategies.

In Trinidad, traditional masquerade or 'ole mas' was performed in the context of colonialism and often drew on frightening images of devils or demons eating human flesh and carrying whips reminiscent of slavery. After independence, in formal democracy, "pretty mas" gained ascendance; pretty mas is more joyful (but sometimes considered less artistic) with bikini and bead-clad players dancing through the streets of Port of Spain in masquerade bands with hundreds or thousands of players (Hill 1972; Green and Sher 2007). However, if Carnival performance strategies respond to historically particular configurations of power, it makes sense that ole mas would re-emerge in neoliberalism. In fact, in an effort to describe transformed relationships between citizens and states in the contemporary world, many political theorists have resorted to pre-modern terms such as "baroque" (Mbembe 2003), "new Middle Ages" (Ecco 1986), "medieval" (AlSayyad and Roy 2006), and "empire" (Hardt and Negri 2000).[7]

In 2010, Cobo Town marked the first major ole mas performance to take place during the main celebration of Carnival on Monday and Tuesday in many decades. The two masquerade designers for Cobo Town are Ashraph Richard Ramsaran and Shalini Seereeram. In an interview with Ashraph, I asked what inspired him to create this Carnival band. Ashraph described how Cobo Town is about the decay of society and referred to politicians, businessmen,

and the legal system as "vultures." In terms of design, he used a heavy black fabric for the cape so that it would appear like a Magistrate Robe or even reference Snape in Harry Potter, and also look like 'cobos' (vultures) on the street when they awkwardly jump around.[8] The costumes creatively incorporate common objects such as bicycle reflectors and sun visors. On Monday of Carnival, masqueraders typically wear simpler costumes and the Cobo Town band held placards with puns based on cobo themes like "Let us Prey." On Carnival Tuesday, Cobo Town was in full costume, including a few special costumes and head pieces such as "Cobo in the Red House" – which is a specific reference to the Parliament Building.

Discussing reaction on the street, Ashraph said people really appreciated their performance, especially the politics and the creativity of bringing back ole mas. Finally, I wondered if he thought that Cobo Town contributed to the increasing public protest over state politics and he replied, "Yes, I think a lot of people were fed up. {Prime Minister} Manning was like... I don't want to say a dictator, but he was kind of losing it – I almost feel sorry for him. Coming to the end people treated him like shit – but you can't be spending millions of dollars building your palace when there's no beds in the hospital… this year I think was the first time people were quite vocal about it, so that's why there was change."

Social Media Tactics by Trinidadian Artist-Activists

In Trinidad, young people are quick to embrace new media technologies and currently a large percentage of the population accesses the Internet regularly (Miller 2011, 2001); many activists were also early adopters of social media. Internet usage is determined more by age than class, and cell phones (widely known as "BB" for Blackberry) are ubiquitous. More Trinidadians own computers now and inexpensive hourly Internet cafés are prevalent throughout

the country. Social media platforms like Facebook are commonly employed to connect Trinidadians in the diaspora, and Facebook has become a meaningful way for dispersed families to share their lives, as many people have left for overseas employment. In fact, Trinidad's overall population has declined over the last fifteen years.

Ethnographic analyses of media emphasize the specificity of these practices and here I focus on the widespread use of social media by artist-activists in Trinidad. Rubadiri Victor of ACTT makes extensive use of Facebook for organizing, and the Cobo Town masquerade band was advertised and documented on Facebook through "Cat in Bag" Productions, creating access to these images that would not have been possible previously. Moreover, the "Drummit" was a rally organized to protest the Summit of the Americas meeting in Port of Spain in 2009, and this event gained considerable national and international reach through the circulation of images and videos on the Web. Facebook and YouTube in particular have created new possibilities for the dissemination of political information, along with circulating creative videos that oppose government ministers and policies.

In one example, I discuss a short video collage piece that ridiculed Prime Minister Patrick Manning and head of UDeCOTT, Calder Hart (the video can be accessed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8A3ATb5P4k). For music, the piece uses a popular dancehall song entitled "My Money Ha Ha" by Merital Family and Vybz Cartel. One image for the original song shows these Jamaican dancehall artists posing as "gangsters," while the song celebrates their wealth in a satirical, bragging style. The verses humorously flow and rhyme about all the places these artists stash their huge amounts of cash.

However, a two-minute video collage piece circulating on YouTube, entitled "Manning Money Ha Ha!" transposes Merital's gangster image of illicit wealth onto the heads of

government in Trinidad, effectively refiguring the wealth and power of the neoliberal state as illegitimate. In the video, Prime Minister Manning's disembodied face is suspended against a black background while his mouth clownishly appears to sing the chorus, "My Money Ha Ha!" next to the dancing face of Calder Hart. As the song verses list the vast amounts of money they spend, the scene cuts to images of NAPA and the Hyatt Waterfront Project, but spectacular urban development is immediately juxtaposed with images of poverty and even the tagged toe of a dead body, from the front page of a newspaper citing the rising murder rate. The final verse of the song jokingly describes getting money from foreign heads of state:

> Queen Elizabeth a gi me money
> Barack Obama yes dem a gi me money…
> Gi mi money wi waan money
> Laugh we a laugh an spen money ha ha

During this part of the song, the video reappropriates archival photos that explicitly show Manning dining with Queen Elizabeth and shaking hands with Obama, to suggest intriguing connections between international aid deals and gangsterism. In sum, the visual images resignify the music to effectively critique the arrogance of political elites who channel billions of dollars in national resource revenues into elite projects, in direct detriment to the Trinidadian masses.

The actions of artist organizations, masquerade groups, and video artists -- along with the wide dissemination of their activities through social media – contributed to public outrage over the egregious actions of the government in Trinidad. Investigations into the inappropriate use of public funds were launched, including a probe into the Urban Development Corporation, specifically the role of the Executive Chairman Calder Hart. He fled the country in March 2010 to avoid corruption charges; newspaper articles stated that he left for Florida with a one-way ticket and two suitcases. Shortly thereafter, the combined pressure from artists/activists and

citizens led to the downfall of the government in May 2010. In the national election, the People's National Movement (PNM) government of Patrick Manning was defeated by an opposition coalition party (People's Partnership), and Kamla Persad-Bissessar became the first female Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Conclusion – Unpredictable 'Creatives' in the Symbolic Economy

Analyses of neoliberalism in multiple global contexts reveal transformed relationships between citizens and states that raise troubling questions about sovereignty and possession (Merry 2001; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Roitman 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). In some contexts, the decline of communist-influenced revolutionary activity has led to democratic mobilization and demands on states in the name of citizenship, as described by James Holston in Brazil (2008); other contexts have produced disparate spheres of enfranchisement and exclusion (Simone 2004; Hart 2006). In Trinidad, I emphasize the centrality of a resource-based economy in shaping relations between citizens and the rentier-state, especially the radical contrast between the nationalizing impetus of independence-era Trinidad and the neoliberal period, where privatization not only undermines the material base of society, it impacts relations of political legitimacy and cultural imaginaries.

Focusing on cultural politics, the practices of radical artists in Trinidad became particularly effective against governmental efforts to transform Port of Spain into a global city – a process designed to disembed national space from citizens and reorient it towards an international political and business clientele. This process illustrates how globalizing dynamics aim to transform structures and meanings *within* national space in ways that may radically alter the normative contours of liberal-democratic states (Smith 2002; Sassen 2001, 2006a, 2006b;

Ong 2006). In arguing for the importance of location, Sassen explicitly critiques "hypermobility" in globalization theory, as it "excludes a whole array of activities and types of workers from the story of globalization that are in their own way as vital to it as are international finance and global telecommunications"(2006b:11). While Sassen emphasizes the importance of the cultural sector for global cities, my ethnographic research in Trinidad suggests greater complexity in the engagement between artists and capital in urban domains today. States and corporations are compelled to recruit the best creative talent to manifest their interests in all forms of sign making, which demonstrates increased dependence on artists and suggests heightened contestation in symbolic domains, including urban planning as the ultimate spin (Dávila 2008; Goldman and Papson 2011).

In Trinidad, the production of 'comparative advantage' through cultural distinction and branding led to an aggressive redevelopment strategy by the state, but artists were not so easily bulldozed. The practices of many artists in Trinidad build on a social orientation with historical depth that increasingly conflicted with state interests in the cultural sphere. The state's neoliberal agenda in Trinidad produced conflict over the meaning of culture and place, thrusting artists to the center of political opposition. Artists successfully challenged the state's redevelopment agenda by creatively exposing the corruption and myopia of top-level politicians. One artist described the shift towards authoritarianism in Trinidad as "the politics of maximum leadership,"[9] but beyond wealth alone, the production of 'maximum leadership' required symbolic production: the visible manifestation of status through internationally recognizable architectural and cultural marvels. When the exercise of power -- political, corporate, military -- is increasingly waged on symbolic terrain and dependent on the outcome of particular sign wars, the actions of artists become vital to the success or failure of these campaigns.

END NOTES

1. Trinidadian novelist Earl Lovelace sensitively explores the tenuous connection to the land and to the nation among Trinidadians in *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979). See, also, Caribbean scholar Patricia Mohammed, 2002. This sense of temporality has also contributed to the emphasis on festival arts and music in Trinidad.

2. Foundational texts on spectacle and simulation include Debord 1983 and Baudrillard 1983, 1998, and Bourdieu on symbolic capital 1984. For recent texts that discuss the concept of spectacle in relation to urban space and scalar conflicts, see Tsing 2000, 2005, Adams 2010, Baloy 2011, Hubbert 2010, Ingram 2009.

3. For extensive discussion on the history of calypso in Trinidad, see Rohlehr 1990 and Hill 1993. See Balliger 2001 on music consumption, citizenship, and globalization in Trinidad.

4. On energy-based economies as "rentier states," see Coronil 1997.

5. See Watts 2004 and Ferguson 2006 on the politics of extraction economies in Africa, and how privatization creates little benefit for the wider national society. "Capital is *globe-hopping*, not *globe covering*" (Ferguson 2005:38).

6. Rubadiri Victor, Personal Communication, 2009.

7. To further appreciate Cobo Town, I briefly elaborate this vampire vs. vulture analysis. Of course, capital accumulation still occurs by "sucking living labor," but there are significant ways in which contemporary capitalism increasingly thrives off the dead. First, consider Kevin Bales's work on contemporary slavery, which he estimates at 25 million, and he argues that human life is cheap and highly expendable in the many nether-zones of the world economy (1999). In David Harvey's recent work, he argues that wage depression along with abundant surplus capital are largely responsible for contemporary capitalist crises; in other words, as capital seeks a higher rate of return through financial instruments and market speculation, it becomes more detached from labor and laborers, leaving these populations in a state of decay (2010). Moreover, while Foucault describes *modern* power as biopolitics (1978, 2003), in Achille Mbembe's essay entitled "Necropolitics," he counters that in many parts of the world today, power functions through terror and death, as many states no longer claim a monopoly on violence or function through territorial sovereignty. "Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional warlords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill… New linkages have therefore emerged between war making, war machines, and resource extraction" (2003:32-33).

8. Ashraph Richard Ramsaran, Personal Communication, 2010.

9. Rubadiri Victor, Personal Communication, 2009.

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