Happiest People Alive: An Analysis of Class and Gender in the Trinidad Carnival

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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HAPPIEST PEOPLE ALIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF CLASS AND GENDER IN THE TRINIDAD CARNIVAL

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Asha St. Bernard

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

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Abstract

Many of the marketing strategies inherent to the modern version of the Trinidad Carnival include texts that represent Trinidadians as young, fit, bikini-wearing, party enthusiasts. In these advertisements, Trinidadians are often characterized as carefree and welcoming to anyone participating in the much-anticipated annual festival. However, dominant narratives highlight certain groups and cultural aspects of the island while frequently masking several inequalities. They cleverly conceal other narratives and therefore marginalize groups and individuals from the very festival that is understood by many as a national symbol. Through informal participant-observation, and an analysis of some of the main promotional material, in particular popular carnival websites, and entertainment pages on social networking sites, several inequalities are illuminated. This thesis critically analyses the ways in which Carnival as a commodity disenfranchises some natives and reproduces notions of race, class, and gender in a national context.

Keywords

Trinidad Carnival, Media, Race, Class, Gender, Sexualisation, and Carnival Body
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Writing this thesis was truly a challenging experience. I came into the Media Studies program full of excitement and enthusiasm, and with a clear idea of what I wanted to research. As I soon found out, my sheer enthusiasm was not enough – life throws you curveballs when you least expect. Sometimes, no amount of preparation prepares you for what lies ahead. While I can think of countless good experiences from my time at Western, I must acknowledge how very difficult other times were, and in the same breath, I must give thanks to the people who helped me along the way.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction and Background of the Study

My interest in the Trinidad carnival began at the tender age of four or five, when, in kindergarten, our school put on their very own small carnival for the infants, who, accompanied by parents and guardians, donned that year’s costumes and innocently danced around the school’s courtyard to vibrant carnival songs. I do not remember much else from that first encounter, except for the fact that I was dressed as Jasmine from the 1992 Disney movie Alladin, and because of this, wore a sheer blue genie pants and a sparkly silver top with colourful sequins that shone even more in the sunlight. I have pictures to thank for that specific memory – pictures that show my hair well braided with silver accessories firmly stuck to end of each plait – similar to Cleopatra’s beaded mane.

It is easy at that age to fall in love with dress-up and anything that fuels fantasy. It helped too that my both parents had been involved in carnival festivities and continued for many years after my first carnival. I could recall the joy and excitement it brought me to see them prepare for carnival, dressing up and leaving the house, often leaving me in the care of my grandparents, where I sat glued to the television, for the tiniest sight of them on the Carnival coverage that came across local television. Not always I took part in carnival in those early years, but each year brought a renewed excitement.

My interest was interspersed with concern many years later when my participation in carnival expanded to include modeling the costumes for the groups who sold them. As an eighteen-year-old secondary school student I liked nothing better. How
many teenagers would not grab the opportunity to be a model (however insignificant it may be) to be considered, as models are considered, attractive and revered as social butterflies, especially at a time when social media, namely Facebook, was the “it thing” and image management was high on the agenda of the young and impressionable? Adding a pay cheque to that made it all the more appealing. It was fun in those days, and if I must be honest, it was easy money too.

Those late teenage and early adulthood years opened my eyes to the reality of the fantasy that I had grown so accustomed to. Most times I was chosen to model, and to put it plainly, in addition to my petite size and figure, I would not doubt that it was because of my lighter brown skin complexion, and my “manageable” hair (my hair was straightened then). In other words, I was Black/Afro-Trinidadian enough to depict carnival and Trinidad and Tobago, but not too Black, with obvious typical Black features. Now, to be fair, darker-skinned young women were also selected to model, but it seemed to me (and several others – I would overhear conversations) that many times there was an obvious preference among those who were choosing, for light-skinned, mulatto-looking women even – someone whose look was equivocal enough to walk the proverbial ‘middle line’ when it came to race and identity, but whose features are unfairly held in high esteem, and seen as more desirable over others. Moreover, body types was a huge criterion; the slimmer and more shapely a woman was, the higher her chances of being selected. During that time I had also borne witness to sexual objectification of women in particular, whose bodies were solely used and sometimes exploited to sell the product (carnival costumes), and while I am not holding any one person responsible for these
events, I acknowledge a patriarchal, heteronormative system that is prevalent in Trinidad, an island like many others still reeling in the aftermath of colonialism.

However, Carnival in Trinidad is a vibrant scene; it is a season like no other. Months of preparation result in months of partying and music competitions, which all end in a two-day street festival full of music, dancing, costumes, and sheer merriment. It is said that even then the festivities are not completely over, as those involved in carnival begin planning for the year ahead. Costume designers and event organizers meet to discuss past designs and events in order to improve next year’s Carnival; musicians leave the island on tour to perform at other carnivals; masqueraders\(^1\) reminisce and relive their carnival experiences with anticipation for the new year. Thus, the carnival spirit is ethereal in Trinidad; it looms over the island like a guiding force, igniting the creative energies of the people.

In our imaginations, Trinidad seems like a tropical paradise where few sleep for more than seven hours each night, the majority too busy with the frivolities of life. Bars open early and close late; for many, getting to the beach is a short walk or drive away; you could chat with your neighbour for hours; customer service is laissez faire – everything seems laissez faire. The incessant nonchalance is a by-product of the cherished carnival culture. Many Trinidadians hold the carnival in high esteem; some say it keeps the island afloat with its economic achievements and as a channel for uninhibited self-expression. I have heard people say that Trinidadians would not fight for change, but they will fight for carnival. I believe that this is true. Hence, the Trinidad carnival is an

\(^1\) People who take part in the masquerade/costumed street procession; this participation is also known as “playing mas’,” where mas’ is the abbreviated version of masquerade.
integral part of Trinidadian society. Understanding its importance, and treating it as a crucial part of national identity, or as a significant agent regarding what it means to be Trinbagonian\textsuperscript{2}, is helpful in nurturing a positive change in Trinidad and Tobago\textsuperscript{3}. To put it another way, by regarding its persuasive power, we can make adjustments that will benefit more people. Due to the festive nature of carnival, it has a reputation of bringing people together. Though this is, on the surface, an accurate picture, it is naive. Carnival is more complicated than it may seem.

This thesis focuses on Trinidad carnival as a site where meanings of identity are negotiated. It seeks to highlight the varying levels of power that are inherent in the festival, and the repercussions this power relation has on Trinidadian society and Trinidadian identities. With the help of existing literature about the formation and alteration of carnival in Trinidad, my own experiences with Trinidad carnival, and an analysis of some key promotional material, I hope to expose the influence of capitalism and the growing commerciality of the Trinidad carnival, on class, gender, and sexuality in Trinidad, and on perceptions of the same. In light of this, I have formulated three main questions to guide the research and analysis of the cultural products that help to construct contemporary Carnival and publicly reinforce dominant ideology. Ideally, these three questions will help to convey what image of Trinidad and its people are portrayed via some popular media that promote Carnival. The questions are as follows:

\textsuperscript{2} This term is used to collectively refer to citizens of the nation state, Trinidad and Tobago who are otherwise known respectively as Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

\textsuperscript{3} The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is made up of the two respective islands, but it will default to Trinidad in most instances as the main carnival is held there (in Trinidad), and as it is the bigger, and hence typically representative of the two islands.
• How has the commercialization of Trinidad Carnival affected its cultural significance?
• What are the implications of the over-representation of women in Carnival media?
• How does Trinidad Carnival, as a national symbol, marginalize certain groups and individuals?

Additionally, this work emphasizes the rapidly growing modern-day carnival experience. This modern-day experience is the product of private entrepreneurs who have created a carnival within carnival for people who can afford its exclusivity. At the core of this thesis is a focus on the ways in which carnival is a means of affiliating oneself with certain groups in society, whether along financial lines or otherwise, and hereby subtly asserting divisiveness rather than togetherness.

Fundamental to this research is the way popular carnival organizers use local media in their portrayal of carnival. Carnival is praised for its potential to unite people of varying economic, social, and racial ranks, but with each passing year, several of the media representations of carnival have become very limited in what they present. In other words, the commerciality of the festival has simultaneously brought about superficiality on the parts of those who are out to make a profit; there is struggle over meanings of what it means to be Trinidadian – between the indigenous and the commercial. Tradition is undermined in the process. Many of these organizers are selective in how they portray carnival, with the ultimate goal being to boost their brand/image and attract a certain
echelon of patrons. These practices detract from the progressive potential of carnival. They show preference to some groups and individuals while blatantly disregarding others. Carnival then, has become a season to identify as rich or poor, Black or White, male or female, among others. These dichotomies have found their way into the epicentre of Trinidadian culture, and furthermore, into the most significant season which is culturally allotted for freedom from hegemonic influences and the contesting of such powers.

Three chapters make up this thesis. In this first chapter, “Introductions and Background of Study,” I introduce the reader to Trinidad Carnival by giving a brief history of its formation over the years. I also provide some insight to Trinidadian culture to create context for further understanding the issues presented. Moreover, Chapter One includes the significance of this work, in which I highlight the problem at hand, and places this work in a wider body of scholarship that addresses surrounding issues of carnival. In the end, I provide the theoretical framework and explain methodological aspects of the thesis.

Representations of social class and identity frame the second chapter. In this chapter I explore how identity is constructed by local media representations of Trinidad carnival in order to address specific audiences. I juxtapose the carnival on a more national level, as represented by organizations affiliated with the government, with the carnival that is privately run by largely middle-class organizing committees. Their very nuanced ways of representing class through their carnival advertisements is striking. I make the point that though carnival has numerous social functions – among them, the highly perceived function of building community – its inherent divisive structure
prohibits this. Rather, advertising practices align persons with people like themselves through cultural signifiers of identity that are deeply embedded in a history of social, cultural, and economic stratification.

The third chapter expands this analysis of representation and identity, emphasizing gender, sexuality, and class. Trinidad Carnival uses and exploits female bodies to depict carnival. This has become an issue especially because the women used are an unfair representation of the women in Trinidad, and of many of the people who actively take part in the festival. These habits point to a deliberate agenda on the part of organizers who present sexualized, idealized images of beauty to stay in business and outshine their competition, while concurrently reinforcing dominant beauty ideals more akin to North American and European beauty standards.

I conclude with a textual analysis of advertisements created by selected carnival organizers and from my personal experience with carnival. In this section I also propose ideas for future carnival research and give suggestions for a progressive carnival, especially where representation is concerned.
1.1 Welcome to Trinidad Carnival! A Brief History

One of the most honest, creative depictions of Carnival in Trinidad is the novel, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, by Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace. The text portrays a young man with very little to his name, competing for the attention of a young woman in his neighbourhood against the backdrop of carnival. It reveals key issues of masculinity, race and identity, gender, sexuality, and class struggles among working class Trinidadians, yet situates them within wider Trinidadian society. All of these matters surely exist on the island today but are easily overshadowed at carnival time. The growing commerciality of carnival has resulted in the glitz and glamor that now characterize the festival and perceptions of it. Women are frequently photographed confidently modeling shiny, skimpy costumes. They pose for photographers with faces touched up by professional make-up artists. Increasingly, with the assistance of media and advertising, carnival has become a highly commoditized attraction, in which pertinent issues raised by Lovelace are disguised rather than exposed.

A line from Lovelace’s novel speaks volumes about the impact Carnival has on some individuals. He writes:

The yard didn’t know by what means he [Aldrick, the main character] had arrived at his decision not to play masquerade, if decision it was. They thought it needed some kind of heroism possessed by extraordinary men, some tremendous act

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4 The carnival I refer to here is the main carnival held in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad, and it will also be referred to as *Trinidad Carnival* throughout the document.
of will, to refrain from playing masquerade; so they began to look at him with a new respect and puzzlement (163).

This excerpt illuminates the fervor with which many people are engaged in carnival, and the disbelief and bewilderment that often strike when they learn that some are opposed, or lack sufficient interest in it. How can they be wrong to feel and express such shock, especially when local Trinidadian media project the notion that to be a Trinidadian is to be one with carnival? Carnival and its participants have changed several times over the decades, and the festival continues to transform with each passing year. The idea of being one with carnival as a sign of authentic Trinidadian citizenship or identity is, in the history of Carnival, relatively new.

The loud, festive music, colourful costumes and revelry of today’s carnival, are laden with cultural politics. Carnival in Trinidad, most popularly known as Trinidad Carnival, has its roots in pre-Lenten celebrations held by European settlers to the island in the late 1700’s. In 1783, the “Spanish Crown” allowed Roman Catholics in nearby islands to settle in Trinidad (Lashley 1). According to Renu Juneja, they were “French settlers of the eighteenth century, but [Carnival’s] final shape and content belong to African slaves who took over carnival with emancipation in 1834” (87).

The slaves mocked their planters’ elite indoor balls, in the yards\(^5\) where they (the slaves) stayed, and added African traditional masking and dancing to their version of the masquerade. Juneja notes however, that for fifty years following emancipation, while carnival belonged predominantly to “lower class blacks…even the colored middle classes

\(^5\) The yard here refers to the outdoor area on the premises of a plantation house. The slaves’ dwelling/slave quarter was usually a designated space on the yard.
disassociated themselves from this plebeian creation” (88). Throughout its history, carnival has undergone many significant changes. It has moved from an imported, sophisticated festival initially celebrated predominantly by French Creole planters and other elites on the island, to a raucous celebration of freedom by the African Creoles (Riggio), and then to a widely participatory, eminent and commercialized festival seen today.

The deliberate disassociation of the middle class was an effect of colonial influence. The desire for hegemonic acceptance, particularly by those in the middle stratum to uphold dignity and maintain respectability, was born from those early colonial relations. The concept of respectability is further explained by Samantha Noel who draws attention to the role of the jamette – lower class Black women who were looked down upon as they used their bodies in dance, as a form of rebellion against the rigid hierarchal system (65) – by way of example. She states, “These more rebellious women were aware of how the body could be used as a form of protest” (66). Consequently they posed a threat to the hierarchal order that was trying to be upheld and were therefore seen as inappropriate and taboo. Members of the middle class, then, saw carnival as vulgar and oppositional, and therefore, unbecoming of someone with class. This juxtaposition of appropriate and inappropriate is explored in this thesis because the carnival still remains significantly regulated by groups that have substantial cultural

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6 Trinidad Carnival has become a main tourist attraction on the island, and is heavily marketed to local, regional and international audiences with many large corporations getting involved as sponsors - for example, competing telecommunications companies such as Bmobile and Digicel, food producers such as Nestle, and oil companies such as Bp Trinidad and Tobago (BPTT) among others.

7 Respectability is the notion of being decent and proper, in keeping with the colonial authority and its ideological standards of attitudes and behaviors.
impact on the island. Though the regulation and management have brought about economic benefits, as they have assisted in crafting a perfectly packaged and desirable carnival, my question is: Who does this really benefit?

Errol Hill, who made a crucial contribution to Carnival Studies as a pioneer in the study of Trinidad Carnival with his book, *The Trinidad Carnival: A Mandate for a National Theatre*, notes:

Trinidad and Tobago became an independent nation in August 1962, and the first independence carnival was held on February 24, 1963. The spirit of pride and daring that marked the achievement of nationhood was evident in planning the Dimanche Gras Show that year (106).

As noted, pre-Lenten Carnival had been on the island before this period. However, the change in governance brought with it a brand new sense of pride and nationhood, which was celebrated at the carnival of 1963 and those onward. Along with this change came a series of events showcasing local talents as the festival became mainstream. This consequently influenced the carnival as it is celebrated today, and helped foster the idea that Carnival is synonymous with Trinidadian culture – that it is a shared, common experience.

Writing about carnival post independence, Philip Kasinitz references Hill as he notes:

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8 Dimanche Gras is a grand show that is held on the Sunday preceding Carnival Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It is made up of a costume competition (King and Queen of the Masquerade). These costumes are among the most elaborate in size, design and cost. There is also a calypso competition (Calypso Monarch) after which the winner is announced.
After independence in 1962, Carnival also became a source of nation-building for a status-conscious elite who paradoxically took its cultural cues from the poor and converted the latter’s symbols of equality into expressions of national unity in an otherwise profoundly stratified society (95).

Ironically, the meaning of certain behaviours associated with Carnival were altered, appropriating some formerly taboo actions, such as the ‘vulgar’ dancing of the jamette, especially once performed by ‘respectable’ members of society. Hence, certain aspects of the festival became more desirable once members of the middle and upper-middle classes started doing it themselves.

Trinidad Carnival has since influenced the carnivals in other Caribbean islands, and has been exported to the United States of America, Canada and England by Caribbean immigrants. The carnival saw enormous growth during the oil boom in Trinidad in the 1970s. Attire continued to evolve from more traditional costuming\(^9\), to what is now called “pretty mas”\(^{10}\), created by “formerly educated middle-class artists [who] changed aesthetic standards through their use of new materials…” (Green and Scher 15). The change in aesthetic can also be attributed to the commercialization of the

\(^9\)“Traditional costuming” refers to traditional carnival characters that individuals usually made themselves and portrayed year after year. Each year a new costume was made and the masquerader would perform for money and/or sometimes scare and taunt the audience.

\(^{10}\)“Pretty mas” (mas’, is short for masquerade, and will be used throughout this paper) refers to the sexier, bikini-like (female)/ board shorts (male) costumes that have been increasingly appearing in the street parade and especially sought after by younger masqueraders (though people of all ages purchase these costumes).
festival. This type of masquerade is most prevalent in the Caribbean, and in carnivals celebrated in the Caribbean diaspora today.

Unlike traditional costumes often made by the individuals who would later wear them, or by costume designers using simpler, cheaper resources, for pretty mas’, “the materials they introduced were expensive and often imported with the result that people raised their expectations of a certain level of craftsmanship” (Green and Scher 15). Green and Scher mention two influential “masmen” Peter Minshall and Wayne Berkely, who, in the 70’s made elaborate costumes and that mostly appealed to the middle class (16). Over the years however, the carnival costume business proved to be profitable and has since become very competitive. To keep up with trends and to interest younger generations and up and coming masqueraders, carnival bands\textsuperscript{11} have made these costumes sexier, especially as more women became involved in carnival.

Today when people talk about “pretty mas” what comes to mind are showgirl-type costumes. These costumes are playfully, and in some cases, mockingly referred to as “bikini and beads” costumes as many of them are literally bikinis decorated with sequins, feathers and beads that dangle and shake as the wearers dance energetically to carnival songs. The disdain some people have for this new and popular type of costuming comes from the belief that the authentic creativity of past costume designers is now replaced by generic designs. Even Peter Minshall, one of the original pioneers of pretty mas’, whose work is held in high regard for its extraordinary level of creativity and the theatrical performances it inspired, has shown his contempt for this new style of mas’. He is quoted

\textsuperscript{11} Carnival bands are organized groups/businesses that create and sell costumes each year for carnival. Several of them compete for the title “Band of the Year.”
as describing pretty mas’ and a “merely a handful of sequins and beads;” his dissatisfaction is seen clearly as he implies that there is a reduced level of creative value in contemporary carnival costuming (*One on One*).

The modern-day carnival celebrated in Trinidad is a period of festivity open to the public. There is something for everyone to get involved in. However, the majority of activities, and the best events and experiences are restricted for those who can afford, sometimes exorbitantly, to be part of the fun. This is especially seen in the party events/fetes that lead up to the street parade, and have become a crucial part of the overall carnival experience. It is also evident in the street parade, where members basically pay for free reign of the streets, while non-paying participants or onlookers are restricted to the sidelines during these processions, sometimes violently, if they intrude.

1.2 Understanding Trinidadian Society: Race and Class Relations

Any work which seeks to critically analyze conditions, especially those of inequality, in large social settings such as a nation must first put in perspective the ethnic, racial and class dimensions specific to that place. This is central to comprehending the varying dimensions of advertising carnival to local and foreign markets. The backdrop of this project and the analysis of the popular contemporary portrayals of carnival, rely profoundly on an understanding of these relations on the island of Trinidad. As such, the theorization of Trinidadian society is fundamental in explaining the shifts in carnival, which have resulted in the one we celebrate today in the 21st century – a carnival that is not exclusive to, but caters mostly to the middle and upper-middle classes.
As anthropologist Daniel Miller writes:

Trinidad has always been an island divided between a population which was designated as white and ruling and a population designated as Black and Asian...which was ruled...The hegemonic pressures have created a culture of disparagement of the powerless and emulation of the powerful (22).

This is an accurate description of the power relations in Trinidad and how people typically tend to recognize identity, power and control there – in terms of race, color, class, and ultimately, status. This description of Trinidadian society ignores lingering conflicts among “lesser powerful” groups\(^{12}\). For instance, despite over six decades of independence, it is common knowledge on the island that tensions between the two main racial groups, Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians\(^{13}\), are still present (Schaffner 192). The Indo-Trinidadian presence on the island originated when Indians were brought to Trinidad as indentured labourers after slavery. They settled in groups together, while freed Africans and creoles did the same. Each racial group held firm to their ethnic traditions, and since the Africans had been on the island for generations before the indentured Indians, they felt that more was owed to them. As a result, there were rivalries

\(^{12}\) Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians are in many ways still compared to, and perceived as inferior to the likeness of whiteness, hence, “lesser powerful”. To compound already existing tensions, there are still unresolved issues between persons of Indian and African descent in Trinidad.

\(^{13}\) Indians in Trinidad refer not to aboriginal people, but rather to the descendants of indentured laborers who were brought to Trinidad from India the 1800s.
between the two groups over land, patriotism, and other rights in a space where neither of them held initial claim.

The statistical breakdown of the racial groups in Trinidad, according to Garth Green in “Marketing the Nation”, is as follows: 40% African descent, 40% Indian descent and the remaining 20% are Chinese, ‘Whites’, Syrian-Lebanese and a mixture of any of those previously mentioned (284). V.S Naipaul, acclaimed novelist and Nobel Prize winner, writes brazenly about White imperialism and race in the West Indies, particularly in Trinidad, the place of his birth. His analysis is straightforward. Naipaul writes, “Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged white audience to see how much they despise one another. They despise one another by reference to whites” (84). The situation is not as obvious as it is made to seem. Since independence in 1962, there have been major strides and successes towards cultural integration. Consequently, Trinidad is unique in the sense that for its tiny island size there exists an abundance of cultural diversity, which is, for the most part, shared by many and across cultures. This does not, however, discount the reality that racial stereotypes, and judgments based on skin colour exist.

Remaining tensions are generally hidden, as members from each group mix and mingle daily and are integrated on the busy streets of Port-of-Spain (Trinidad’s capital) and similar hubs and towns about the country, at the work place, and at schools. After decades of sharing a geographical space, and myriad cultures\(^\text{14}\), even merging these

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\(^{14}\) In addition to European culture, Asian (especially Indian) and African cultures are very prominent in the forms of festivals, religions, foods and art. Often, in Trinidad and Tobago, these are shared and celebrated across cultures and by people of different ethnicities. Some of them have also been merged; for example,
cultures to create new authentic cultures, customarily, citizens speak proudly of the multiculturalism of the island, and the coming together of its people to create a distinctively united group. Reflecting on Trinidad post-independence, Hill notes, “In that time, Trinidad, the senior of the two-island nation, became possibly the most cosmopolitan country for its size anywhere in the world” (3). People of all races, shades and religions walk the streets freely and engage one another from simple phatic communication to conducting serious business arrangements.

This unification was one of the main goals after Independence and the creation of nationalism on the island. Defining nationalism, Anton Allahar asserts: “Nationalism can be seen as an ideology espoused by those who live in already established nations complete with economic, political, legal…autonomy in a clearly demarcated territorial space” (3). That being said, Trinidad is a site wherein nationalism should be an easy concept to grasp and accomplish – especially given its manageable population of only 1.3 million people.

However, Allahar does not fail to mention:

It stands to reason, too, that in multiethnic states where two or more ethnic groups are more or less even in numbers, the process of nation building could be a contentious one. And this is likely to be even more accentuated where the ethnic groups in question have developed racialized consciousness (4).

Indian chutney music and African aesthetic soca music were combined to create chutney-soca music, a musical blend of the two genres.
This is the case in Trinidad. Evidence of this is made even more palpable during government elections, when citizens vote along racial lines with hopes that it will be in their best interest. Despite these inevitable tribal qualms, the government, post-independence, was hopeful that the carnival then could be used as a unifier, a celebration of independence, and hence, a symbol of the nation.

This hope for unification was easier imagined than realized. Despite Hill’s claim that the carnival is a reflection of the immense multi-ethnicity of the island, other theorists have noted that control of the carnival immediately post independence, from the early 1960s through 70s, was held predominantly by the Afro-Trinidadians, as the government consisted primarily of members from that ethnic and racial group. Indo-Trinidadian involvement in the carnival during that time was almost non-existent. This has since changed immensely, as over the years carnival attracts a variety of locals from many races, ethnicities and classes, foreigners, as well as investors15 (Green 284). However, this point will be discussed further as class plays an important role in accessing many of the carnival events.

The discussion of a society with racial and class differences cannot be held without a class analysis. Class divisions structure Trinidadian society resulting in an unjust allocation of power and thus, unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Practices often benefit the upper class at the expense of the lower class. As we will see in this case, there is an unfair and biased popular media representation promoted by the upper class. On the topic of nationalism in the Caribbean, Allahar posits, “Nationalism

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15 As a top tourism earner, attracting over 40,000 visitors annually, many have seen opportunities to invest in several of its events, and it the preparation of the parade itself.
cannot be divorced from the class interests of its leading promoters;” hence, “…will most
often be linked to the discrete economic and political interests of its champions” (5).
Therefore, if predominantly persons in the middle-class, which seems to be the trend,
control carnival, it will cater to members of this group.

Class and respectability are intrinsically linked in Trinidad. Imperialism resulted
in value being placed on achieving a certain status on the island. It is safe to say, that in
Trinidad, a lot can be said about a person’s identity and their character based on where
they live, what schools they attended and where they work. Not only is value placed on
achieving status, but on certain body types, skin tones, and other physical characteristics.

Daniel Guerin is well known for his analysis of Caribbean society in the late
fifties and sixties. Across the region, signs of these judgmental practices on the basis of
race and class were still evident. Comparing the Caribbean to the United States, Guerin
writes:

No segregation in the West Indies, no legally codified
discrimination; but the Caribbean brand of racial prejudice,
sneaking about under a mask of hypocrisy, is more irritating
and psychologically, more demoralizing than if it nakedly
showed itself for what it was (69).

For many years after emancipation, even after independence, someone’s skin
complexion, for example, usually indicated how he or she would be treated in society,
and which jobs they would get. For example, until just two decades ago, people with
lighter skin complexions were more likely to be hired to work in banks rather than people
with darker skin.
In addition to matters of race and class, Trinidadians have different shades of skin colour. Although many people do not judge others based on their complexion, one cannot deny that stereotyping and discrimination due to this characteristic still exists. Franz Fanon, writing on the matter race and color says, “For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (12). If we take this into consideration, and apply it to the Caribbean context, more precisely to Trinidadian society, one might question the idea of Blackness and Whiteness as an existing relationship in a society where other racial and ethnic groups coexist. This age-old perception of race and color surely has implications on standards of beauty and carnival advertising, which I will discuss in more detail at a later point in this thesis.

A small, mostly White population is perceived to be at the top of the social hierarchy. Lighter skinned Afro-Trinidadians/ Indo-Trinidadians/ Mixed Creoles, who are perceived to straddle the middle section, while darker skinned Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians are perceived to belong to the middle and lower classes. The scenario I have laid out is by no means that simple. I have simplified for the sake of example; the reality is, of course, far more complicated. As in many societies, the matter of race, class, and color, isolated or combined, and what they attract, is highly complex. Naturally, other factors such as: upbringing/socialization, place of residence, education, jobs/careers, gender, age and social relations factor into the representation and interpretation of skin color.

Undoubtedly, it is a multifaceted situation and honestly cannot be explained in its entirety within the limitations of this section, but the general idea still stands: people judge people based on physical attributes and place value on some more than others.
Typically, because of colonialism, European imperialist ideals are still engrained in the communal mentality. Combined with the importation of western media, on the matter of skin complexion, white = wealth and respect/ perceived as upper-class, foreign and hence more desirable, lighter shades of Black = professionals and middle stratum members, darker shades associated with middle and lower strata unless they have proven themselves otherwise. In Fanon’s words, “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (110), puts into perspective the whole conception of race in a post-colonial space, the relationship between the former and the latter, and the relationships among the former in relation to the latter – even if done so subconsciously.

Similarly, Guerin states:

But the Caribbean air is polluted by yet another relic of slavery, even more lamentable than the racial prejudice that infects the minds of whites. Associating the notion of whiteness with those of wealth and power, slavery inculcated a prejudice in the coloured man, a prejudice against himself: slavery turned him into a “Negrophobe” (71).

The idea of negrophobia, in which Black people dislike the idea of Blackness, is not uncommon in the islands, especially among older generations, and it has not gone away. Recently however, an online article made its way around social media in Trinidad entitled, “Growing Up ‘Too Black’ In Trinidad.” Malaika Crichlow told the story of her coming to terms with her skin colour and accepting herself for who she is. It is an account we would rather imagine was really fiction. She writes: “I grew up in Trinidad in the 80’s
and 90’s as a Black girl child. To be black in a country that idealizes the curly hair and mixed ethnicity aesthetic is tough to say the least.” These beauty ideals are ingrained in the Trinbagonian psyche, the idea that “good hair” is soft, wavy or straight hair as opposed to short, kinky, typically Black hair; and the idea that mixed race people are especially exotic, good-looking, more desirable…especially if the individual is lighter-skinned, with softer hair. Hence, where identity is concerned, apart from the issue of race, skin colour is also an important factor, and while it is connected to race, the colour of someone’s skin has varying significations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, despite being a plural society, Trinidad was equally stratified and there are still instances of societal divisions today. For the purpose of laying out a comprehensible map of the workings of class relations in Trinidad, I particularly like Allahar’s deconstruction of Caribbean nationalism into three main parts: bourgeois nationalism, petty-bourgeois nationalism and working class nationalism (14). Through his analysis, it is easy to see how some groups are marginalized and/or coerced into thinking that their needs are met along with those of the larger group. This structure caters to the ideologies of the dominant group – ideologies which were vastly formed in the likeness of those left by past colonizers, and more presently those influenced by Western ideals, fostering hegemony, fuelled by dominance and consent.

The middle group – referred to as the petty bourgeois, is of particular interest to me as pertains to in tracing recent trends in the Trinidad carnival. This group seems to be responsible for most of the influential aspects of the carnival. With a greater understanding of this middle-echelon within the Trinidadian context, we will realize the
inner workings of contemporary carnival and how it functions. Allahar, in his explication of this group, writes:

Neither the political nor the economic fractions of the petty bourgeoisie in the post-independent Caribbean countries is either revolutionary or nationalist in the genuine sense of the term, for their principal mandate is to preserve the conditions for the expanded reproduction and accumulation of capital. And capitalism has not shown itself to have interest in the masses (16).

Therefore, with the carnival mainly in the hands of what Allahar calls the petty bourgeoisie, we can see how certain interests are more effectively met as opposed to those of the entire group or the majority; as Nurse says, “Cultural mediators and brokers apply principles of inclusion and exclusion to distil Carnival’s myriad cultural elements in their representations” (283).

The commercialization of the culture is another noticeable opportunity for class advantage. With the bourgeois or the petit bourgeois orchestrating some of the most influential Carnival events and creating accompanying images for them, there is a subtle, yet obvious classist power dynamic occurring whether it is intentional or not. It’s like saying: you can join us, but you cannot. These deciding factors are based on social status, financial stability and the many features of physical appearance.

1.3 Problem Statement
Following recent band launches and the beginning of a new carnival season, a Facebook user expressed her frustration in a post saying, “carnival costume photoshoots: where the black people at doh? #aesthetics? one of the reasons why i am adamant about buying my niece black dolls. #smh@society.” This blogger’s vexed response to photographs of models displaying brand new carnival costume designs incited many similar responses. One person’s brief, but weighty comment below the post read, “Almost all advertising in Trinidad,” to show her agreement, and to indicate that the issue brought up by the blogger, that of a lack of racial/skin-colour diversity in advertising, is a common practice in Trinidad.

Like these Facebook users and many others who pay attention to trends in advertising, I cannot ignore some glaring signs in the marketing and promotions industry that privilege some racial and ethnic groups over others, especially on the basis of skin complexion and other physical attributes, like hair. This has become a prominent issue particularly with the growth of commercialism in the carnival industry, and the resultantly high levels of competitiveness among carnival businesses, whose organizers in turn, rely on cultural prejudices to stand out in the competition by highlighting valued notions of beauty. Despite these blatant practices, these businesses manage to thrive and continue to attract growing numbers of participants each year. This points to the level of dominance and consent that has taken over the carnival celebrations and perpetuate inequality in representation. Unfortunately, the problem is not limited to race and skin colour. Representations of class and gender are also tied to capitalist motives.

The problem, therefore, is that many popular contemporary carnival organizers use limited elements of representation to market and sell their products. My aim is to
analyse the very nuanced ways race, class and gender are used in the process, by paying particular attention to their media output – namely various texts on these organizers’ websites – while in some instances, juxtaposing and/or comparing them to other carnival texts. Due to the popularity of some of these businesses, their dominance is inevitable and as such, they have a huge impact on how locals and foreigners understand and experience carnival. I argue that together, they contribute to, and magnify, the disunity and disenfranchisement steadily becoming more apparent in Trinidad carnival.

While these advertisements are made public, with the growing privatization and the realization of carnival as a profit making opportunity, many businesses involved, driven by capitalism, privilege the dominant groups within society. Notions of Western beauty are promoted, devaluing more realistic appearances of many Trinbagonians, and thus continuing a history of self doubt continuing the valuing and longstanding desire for foreign (read American) culture.

This work is largely inspired by past inquiries into carnival, such as the writings of anthropologist John Stewart, who, in his chapter, “Patronage and Control in the Trinidad Carnival,” writes engagingly about the growing business of carnival and its effects on the masses. Regarding patrons’ reactions to the alterations in carnival, he writes, “Recent withdrawal has less to do with religion than with a feeling of encroaching emptiness in the festival.” Stewart attributes this “feeling of encroaching emptiness,” to “increased politicization of the festival” (291). He gives three main goals of this type of control of the festival. They are as follows:

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16 Cable television and other dominant media offload American culture in Trinidad and Tobago.
(1) to maintain control over leadership offices; (2) to manage public belief and sentiment toward a continued recognition of influence and power in these offices; and (3) to cultivate the imagery of a society transcending the culpabilities of racial, social and cultural divisiveness inherited from the colonial past (291).

I am especially intrigued by Stewart’s third point as I see the carnival as an entity that ironically contradicts its very social function. In other words, the carnival space is visibly classist and rife with contestations such as racial and gender peculiarities; or as Lewis and Pile similarly write about Rio Carnival in Brazil, “Carnival is not then, an innocent attraction: it is riddled with multiple power relations, involving differently positioned participants” (24). The same can be said about the Trinidad carnival. Local Trinbagonian narrative promotes Carnival as a national symbol, but popular discourse and practice simultaneously marginalize various individuals and groups from some of the show’s main events and from the nation as epitomized by carnival.

1.4 Literature Review

As previously mentioned, Trinidad Carnival has experienced a significant shift in its structure and appearance over the years. Several academics, from the Caribbean and elsewhere, in fields such as Cultural Studies, Ethnomusicology and Anthropology have written about the Carnival in Trinidad. Their particular interests in the Carnival have proven it to be a site rich in culture and politics, and therefore, worthy of exploration. Many of these scholarly writers have tracked transformations within the carnival and its
aesthetic, structural, and participatory changes from the early days of colonialism on the island in the 1800s to present-day. The current changes I explore are consistent with globalization, and the advancement and widespread use of technology and social media to advertise carnival.

The shift here is influenced by a capitalist agenda on the part of those eager to take advantage of carnival-related business opportunities, namely event organizers and carnival band committees. Hence, the festival is being packaged for economic gain, unlike earlier days when the carnival came to function more as a time for political activism, in the form of opposing hierarchal order and social norms, through dance and songs. Carnival was also a time for progressive community-based expressions of creativity. Although the above elements have not been entirely lost to entrepreneurial aspirations, they have dwindled away in comparison. This work therefore focuses on the idea that the middle class controls contemporary aspects of carnival, which then reflect their values and interests, and where bodies – certain types of female bodies in particular – are used to represent Carnival. It is my contention that these representations of the Carnival ultimately maintain a patriarchal status quo, encourage economic division, and perpetuate preferences based on race and skin color in a society already stratified along those distinct lines.

A significant portion of the existing literature on Trinidad Carnival addresses the history and development of the festival from colonial to postcolonial eras. Some of these texts also emphasize and critique the efforts by those who were in power at the time of independence in Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, to make it a symbol of nationalism. One of the most influential texts is by Errol Hill, who has written extensively on this topic.
His book, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*, provides researchers with a unique historical framework through which it is possible to map the evolution of Carnival. The text, published in 1972, provides detailed descriptions of Carnival in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is important however, to continue the dialogue about Trinidad Carnival for future generations and to document the current practices as a means to understand Trinidadian culture and predict future activities and developments.

Hill delivers an important part of Trinidadian cultural history, and his offering is a great point of reference to see the ways the carnival has evolved over the years. While he ends on a positive note, suggesting ways to enhance the carnival and add merit to its spectacular festivities, his work does not envisage the large-scale changes brought about by the rippling effects of globalization and the increasing commerciality of carnival.

Garth Green and Philip Scher (2007) add to this discussion using the concept of globalization as their main framework, and the role of Carnival as a transnational festival. They see Carnival as having an impact not only on the people in Trinidad and the Caribbean, but also on those in the Caribbean diaspora. Like Hill, they write, “The government has sought to appropriate the festival as a symbol of the nation” (3); this re-establishes the notion of Carnival as representative of Trinidad but does not extensively explore how this done today.

The various ways Carnival was marketed to local and international audiences is presented in Green’s work (2002; 2005). His research includes a close look at the economic changes within Trinidad Carnival and analyzes intentional actions to shift “cultural capital to economic capital” (“Authenticity” 297). Green’s work is particularly useful to my project, as he also focuses on representation and promotion. He notes, “The
central tension in these efforts at cultural promotion and in the struggle for cultural recognition revolves around the desire to convert cultural capital into economic capital” (“Authenticity” 297).

In order to successfully and profitably metamorphose tradition to financial wealth, popular ideology is often privileged when representing culture – making the culture/tradition appear more valuable. This is problematic especially with a festival like carnival because it takes away from the authentic freedom of expression of the people, particularly those at the margins who are typically disenfranchised and underrepresented, while it bolsters an elite minority, whose lifestyle said ideologies more closely reflect.

Similarly, Keith Nurse (1999) also writes about the role of globalization and the changes it has brought especially with respect to the expansion of carnival into a transnational festival. In “Globalization and Trinidad Carnival: Diaspora, Hybridity and Identity in Global Culture,” Nurse’s main argument is “that culturally, the periphery is greatly influenced by the society of the centre, but the reverse is also the case” (661). While the periphery Nurse refers to is the regions outside North America and Britain, namely the Caribbean, and more specifically, Trinidad, as it pertains to cultural celebrations, he alludes that there is some reciprocity on an international level. My focus however, is on the centre-periphery relationship within Trinidad, and how this relationship is further compounded by ideals from an especially North American, European ‘centre’, to the gradual under appreciation and ensuing waning of local or grassroots cultural expressions.

Whereas the works of Green and Nurse refer to and analyze media representations of carnival in the early nineties, I hope to add to this by analyzing more contemporary
media. There have been considerable changes including advances in technology and growing social media networks which have not been explored in relation to Carnival representation and its repercussions. They provide platforms for more people to create media messages and start trends with online posting that often generate feedback in the form of comments by online users. I am interested in the ways businesses create online images for themselves, and thus, create certain interpretations of Carnival. Green’s work provides a political economic framework that could be adopted to analyze the more economic side of these promotional activities, especially by groups and individuals, who seek profits and see carnival as a good way to do so. It is also be helpful in making connections between marketing strategies and global appeal to female (and male) sexuality.

Previous work on Carnival in Trinidad also includes gender and performance analyses. Researchers who study these aspects of Carnival tend to focus on the broadcasting of live events, and music (lyrical content and live performances). Susan Harewood (2006) writes about music, policy and performance. Although she focuses on Barbadian music, due to the similarity of the musical content and performance, a similar approach can be used in order to observe what notions of gender, for example, are represented in popular Trinidadian music videos that depict Carnival.

Harewood’s analysis of gender in Carnival performances is also noteworthy. She takes the stance that women’s performances, such as dancing to soca music, are active rather than passive in the Carnival context (26). I agree with this analysis to a certain extent. With Harewood, I believe that simply saying that women are objectified in the media and within the Carnival context simplifies a complex situation. By doing this we
are assuming that females have little or no agency and easily give into male demands. However, although I agree that women use their bodies actively and with agency, especially during Carnival time, we would be turning a blind eye to the ways these meanings are changed in media representations of the body and of Carnival. Some promotional videos and photographs tend to over-sexualize the female body – so although the female might be dancing and expressing herself freely and assertively – she is then objectified as the camera focuses on parts of her moving body.

Natasha Barnes (2000) explains this at length in her work, “Body Talk: Notes on Women and Spectacle in Contemporary Trinidad,” where she very clearly analyses female presence in Trinidad carnival and the ways in which female bodies convey significant cultural meaning. Her work is certainly thought-provoking and stimulates my interest in female representation in carnival. My chapter on Women, Sexualization and Carnival further critiques these representations in terms of race, age and other physical appearances such as size/weight, which often copy prescribed societal values.

Similar to Harewood and Barnes, Patricia De Freitas (1999) uses a gender analysis to talk about women in Carnival. She focuses on Trinidad Carnival and refers to women as agents of their performances. Also, De Freitas writes more about the media’s manipulation of images, whereby what is presented in the media is not necessarily what is in reality. She writes, “Not all women wine and jam17 or wear revealing costumes, but this is the image that is projected in the media…and to sell Carnival internationally on the

17 To “wine and jam” is to dance freely and have a good time; “jam” usually refers to dancing with/beside someone else, usually touching – back to back, front to front etc.
tourist market as the exotic “Greatest Show on Earth”” (De Freitas 24). The above paragraphs raise questions regarding who creates national identity and maintains hegemony in the Carnival which further encourages class disparity, and the power of those who have and are financially stable to dictate (even subtly) how things should go as this is an increasingly noticeable phenomenon.

Another point that De Freitas makes is that the images portrayed do not accurately represent all women. Instead, they are what the men who dominate Carnival and the media see as beautiful. She adds, “The female masquerader\(^{18}\), therefore, unapologetic in her self-exposure, sensual in her performance, and beautiful in appearance, has become the quintessential metaphor of Carnival, and by extension, the “national” Self” (20). Here exists a fundamental gender analysis of the Carnival, where it can be argued that the creations of Carnival cater to patriarchal and ideological needs.

On the issue of exclusion, Trinidad is extremely multicultural and despite popular thought, not all Trinbagonians partake in carnival events. These decisions to avoid Carnival activities usually arise from religious beliefs or economic circumstances. However, Jocelyne Guilbault outlines how some people are excluded from the Carnival, stating high-ticket prices as one of the main reasons (28).

This thesis maps how popular discourses depict contemporary Trinidad Carnival and the implications on the interpretation of Trinidad Carnival, Trinidadians and the island. Deconstructing popular media texts will also reveal how even national symbols

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\(^{18}\) This refers to someone in costume or a participant of the masquerade.
which are meant to represent all members of a nation concurrently exclude some, especially when they become commodities.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

My goal for this project is to observe and analyze what ideas about Carnival, and what representations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago the media presents. I believe this work is important in understanding how others perceive members of this culture, as well as Trinidadians’ own understanding of themselves in the world. This is significant because popular media representations tend to benefit certain groups. Central to this study are negotiations of gender and the ways in which other issues such as race and class are dealt with in popular Trinidadian discourse.

Theorists and researchers, especially in interdisciplinary fields such as Communications and Media Studies, Cultural Studies and Gender Studies, have focused on representing gender and other aspects of identity in the media, looking at the meanings produced by analyzing their content, and exploring the cultural effects that those meanings have on audiences. The theories that I use to frame this study are critical theory and feminist media theory. The works of Stuart Hall, Roland Barthes, Laura Mulvey, Teresa De Lauretis and Erving Goffman are of particular usefulness as they each make valuable contributions to the ways we understand culture and technology. Given the geographical and cultural context of Trinidad, this project is guided by ideas of post-colonialism, whereby Trinidad and its inhabitants are still very impressionable and are yet to be completely liberated from engrained ideologies of past colonial powers.
Lawrence Grossberg asserts, “Cultural studies now looks at how it is that particular texts, practices, identities already appear to be interpreted, their politics predefined, while acknowledging that this appearance is always part illusory because it is never guaranteed” (55); hence, as a discipline, Cultural Studies is ideal for understanding the politics at work in the texts that promote and discuss Trinidadian culture. Cultural Studies also provides tools for analyzing relations of power, which will assist in understanding which individuals, or groups are marginalized or lack representation in Carnival. On the topic of power, Grossberg states, “Power is real and operates at every level of our lives, located in the limited production and unequal distribution of capital, money, meaning, identities, desires, emotions…” (61), thus illuminating how culture is indeed constructed as opposed to inherent in nature.

Additionally, feminist media theory is also useful as gender plays a crucial role in Carnival. Women’s bodies are used to promote the festival much more frequently and in different ways than their male counterparts, as I will demonstrate later. Also, the dominant discourse of Carnival uses heteronormative language and often has sexual undertones, which are interesting to explore further as they assist in establishing and maintaining a binary conception of sex and gender. The two theories – critical theory and feminist theory, are closely related as they address issues of power and examine the ways culture is constructed in societies.

Hall is interested in representation as a catalyst of meaning and remarks, “Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged…” (Hall, 15). He also examines the correlation of meaning with language and use of signs, drawing on and expanding the work of other theorists such as Ferdinand de
Saussure and Roland Barthes. Likewise, Mulvey focuses on images, looking at gender representations in cinema. Incorporating Barthes’ idea of myth and symbols will be useful to explore the inequality created within the Carnival. While Carnival, and by extension, Trinidad is shown to the world, as a happy place to be, is everyone happy? De Lauretis too, adds to the discussion of gender representations and the role of media in the very construction of gender. Their theories of gender and representation are useful in further understanding media content and can be applied to the cultural product of advertising in Trinidad Carnival, as many similarities are found between what they propose, what is actually presented, and how it is presented to the public. Additionally, applying elements of Goffman’s performance studies will assist in understanding Carnival performances.

1.6 Methodology and Research Method

“The psychological construction of the Caribbean is perhaps most tellingly achieved through the use of visual images to which the region’s music provides an accompanying soundtrack.” (Mike Alleyne, 123)

Online media content easily catches our attention and is also widely shared by online users. Advances in technology have made it possible for people with access to upload information; conversations quickly start, often in the form of cumulative comments under some posts, and sometimes turn into varying discussions among users on trending topics, making visible their respective thoughts and opinions. There are many online forms through which information about Carnival, the body and other expectations are transmitted. Among these are carnival band websites, blogs and other social networking sites such as Facebook. All these channels, through which frequent updates
about Carnival are posted, contain content that is helpful in understanding what is used to represent Carnival and how ideas of the body and popular performance are portrayed, while simultaneously revealing what is not.

I want to explain the current phenomenon in the Trinidad Carnival and will therefore be relying on my own experiences with carnival in Trinidad as a spectator, masquerader, and behind the scenes working at events. In addition, I will be focusing upon media representations of carnival by popular carnival businesses. Thus, this study is qualitative in nature.

The main methods used to collect data for this study are informal participant-observation and textual analysis, as deconstructing and analyzing promotional and other carnival related texts were part of the data collection process. Textual analysis is a qualitative research technique which provides the researcher with an abundance of information in the form of encoded messages that are later decoded and analyzed for their perceived meanings, and can help in showing how culture is produced, transmitted, interpreted and most importantly, the political messages inherent to many cultural texts (Hall, “Encoding/Decoding” 51-53).

The texts that I have chosen constitute a purposive sample as they each contribute to notions of popular, contemporary carnival. I focus my attention on popular carnival band websites (Tribe, Fantasy, Island People, and Yuma) for the carnival year 2015, as they are among the most spoken about in contemporary Carnival, appearing in numerous blogs and other media releases, and popular among young adults (ages 18-35).

Additionally, included in my research is the well-known carnival/entertainment blog, “Trinidad Carnival Diary,” which features trending carnival topics, as well as, the
website for the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago (NCC) that reflects a more traditional type of carnival. The NCC is juxtaposed with the popular carnival band *Tribe* to show the difference in representation styles, and hopefully elucidate my discussion on capitalism and inequality characteristic with contemporary carnival.

In Ted Palys’ words, “The main reason we sample is that it’s frequently impossible, impractical, or just plain silly to assess every unit or object of interest to us” (127). Hence, this purposive sample comprised of these carefully selected texts should provide enough information to formulate a decent analysis of the relationship between Carnival messages, the narrative of carnival as a national symbol, and what that means and who that benefits when we take into consideration questions of power and representation.
Chapter 2

Contemporary Carnival Advertising, Its Audience(s), and Carnival’s Most Visible Participants

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“A cultural movement is ipso facto also a political movement. Carnival may ostensibly appear to be a pure cultural performance, but it is inevitably political from the start.”

(Cohen 154)

Advertising is a crucial tool for constructing fantasies and re-signifying cultural traditions while obscuring the power and underlying politics that are central parts of modern-day carnival. Using representative promotional material, and with reference to previous literature about the “development” of carnival and its participants, I explore the carnival being advertised today through an analysis of the common themes and audience address of these advertisements. This chapter examines contemporary carnival with a focus on the rapidly growing phenomenon of popular contemporary carnival, and discusses tourism, competition and regional classism in a post-colonial space.

2.1 Defining Contemporary Carnival
Trinidad Carnival is a peculiarly dichotomous affair. It is a hybrid explosion of cultural expressions, with two distinct characteristic events that occur simultaneously at any time during the carnival season. Put simply, a traditional type of carnival and a *popular*\(^{19}\) carnival comprise contemporary Trinidad Carnival. The first includes older elements such as the calypso, steel-pan\(^{20}\) music, ole mas’, traditional carnival characters and costuming invoking a time past. These components are far removed from pre-independence carnival. Over the years they have inevitably become contemporized, yet are still regarded as “authentic” for their semblance to tradition and the nostalgia they inspire. Hence, this type of carnival is associated with an older generation of Trinidadians. The contrasting genre, visibly more modern in aesthetic, experience and sound, includes pretty mas’ (also referred to as bikini and beads mas’), the energetic sound of soca music, and a growing number of expensive resort-like events reflecting with the globalization and commercialism of today.

I refer to the latter as popular contemporary carnival due to its prominence in Trinidad, and its rapidly evolving influences in other carnivals around the world\(^{21}\). This type of carnival is of particular interest because of what it indirectly suggests about Trinidadian society. Popular contemporary carnival is partly informed by the images and associated information put forward by some successful and persuasive carnival bands,

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\(^{19}\) I use *popular* to describe the carnival because of how mainstream this particular carnival has become. It is not to be confused with its meaning as commonplace or basic, but rather to be read in the sense that it is what the dominant culture projects.

\(^{20}\) *Pan* refers to the steel pan, or the steel drum, an acoustic instrument that originated in Trinidad in the early 20\(^{th}\) century.

\(^{21}\) Specifically those in Barbados and Jamaica, and the diasporas’ carnivals in England and The U.S.
especially those that attract younger people. The popularity of this more mainstream carnival contributes to its marketability, and has attracted entrepreneurs who have mastered the art of merging culture and profits, or rather, of using and crafting culture to foster profits. We can see how valuable these aspects of culture are, but they are the expense of those who cannot afford to be part of the group having all the fun.

As I will show, many of the promotional materials for this type of carnival are laden with messages that say a lot about the culture and dominant ideologies manifested within. For this analysis, the official website for Trinidad Carnival will be juxtaposed with images from trendy carnival band websites to help draw a conclusion about the current situation of the Trinidad Carnival.

2.2 Advertising Carnival

The dynamic and multidimensional nature of carnival is evident in carnival advertising. Like the festival, the advertising takes numerous forms, and focuses on varying aspects of the carnival. The vast majority usually each identifies one component. For instance, rather than seeing advertisements or promotional material that refer to the carnival in its entirety, what is usually produced are separate texts that each speak for the music, events, or the parade individually, yet representing the festival as a whole. Hence, an advertisement for one party will advertise that specific party firstly, and though just one piece (a single party) of one carnival component (fetes), it connotes the broader picture, the carnival as a whole.

Despite the plethora of promotional material disseminated annually by several events promoters and varying carnival committees, there is an official carnival organizing
body. The umbrella of sites for advertising all things carnival is the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago (NCC). The NCC’s website shows the most comprehensive view of Trinidad’s carnival with information regarding its history, calypso, pan and so on. The site’s dedication to the more traditional elements of carnival is very noticeable. This further emphasizes a disconnection between the traditional contemporary and popular contemporary carnivals as a look at TRIBE’s\(^{22}\) website, for example, shows an entirely different carnival scene. This distinction will be analyzed further on in the chapter.

The notion of *happiness*, as my thesis title telegraphs, is one of the main themes that drive the carnival. Regardless of the type of carnival being advertised, traditional or popular, advertisers attract members of the public through an intentional association of *happiness* with carnival. This is assisted largely by the *myth of happiness* that has, over time, been concomitant with carnivalesque activities. Using Roland Barthes’ theory of myth, in which he states, “…myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system” (14), one can understand more clearly how certain signs, or ideas are used in unison to create the ideal perception of carnival, or a carnival that at the very least has affective power – one that typically draws people to it.

In Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnival of the Middle Ages, he writes, “they [French clergy and others interested] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (6) and implies in his work that the festival brought unlikely people together and

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\(^{22}\) TRIBE is one of the leading carnival bands in Trinidad. TRIBE is also a successful events company and has secured a stable spot in the carnival and entertainment industry within Trinidad and beyond.
encouraged creative expression. Trinidad Carnival is still perceived to be a space for “freedom” and letting off steam; it is a space outside the stresses of everyday life. In local discourse it has been understood as a time of revelry, creativity, rejuvenation and overall, tremendous joy and celebration. Consequently, the theme of laughter that Bakhtin refers to can also be found in the carnival of Trinidad; he notes, “Folk festivities of the carnival type…belong to the culture of folk humour (4). Just as Bakhtin refers to the “laughing people” of then, it can be said that laughter is still an essential part of the festivities in Trinidad today. The laughter brought about by the ‘feel good’ music, the idea of togetherness and essentially notions of patriotism, updates Caribbean scholar and historian Richard D. E Burton’s observation that, “During the 1950s carnival became more and more a symbol of Trinidadian identity, embodying the protonationalist myth of “all of we is one”…” (206). Carnival, therefore, thrives on the perception that, like the pre-Lenten carnival in Bakhtin’s *Rebalais and His World*, it dismantles hierarchal structures, even for a time, and levels everyone together, hence inspiring feelings of solidarity and community.

2.2.1 The NCC

I see this connecting of carnival, patriotism and togetherness the most clearly through the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago (NCC). Their official online presence takes the form of a website that is equipped with regular communication regarding Trinidad Carnival. As the bona fide organizing body of the Trinidad Carnival, the NCC is highly significant and influential. It is the authority over sites for the promotion and dissemination of carnival information. Interestingly, though their website
shows the most comprehensive view of Trinidad’s carnival, it remains traditional in its representation. The site highlights the more customary features whilst disregarding the overtly commercialized, popular versions. In this regard, it is like a respectable grandmother; it is an indication of officialdom while also fostering more of a community-oriented carnival agenda – one that is more concerned with “the people” or the multitudes than the popular contemporised version of carnival could ever be.

The NCC’s site, despite its official nature, still resonates with the people of Trinidad and Tobago through its nostalgic portrayal of the more old-fashioned aspects of carnival, aspects widely associated with earlier, simpler times (before the impact of widespread capitalism). For instance, turning to the website, the images that meet you are those of calypsonians23, stick-fighters, traditional carnival characters, steel-pan players, costumes that are not of the bikini and beads kind, such as: Kiddies’ Carnival and King and Queen costumes. A look at their website is a good indicator of the carnival they endorse; their carnival has inevitably been influenced by commercialism, yet is still more aligned with heritage.

On the NCC’s homepage, an official greeting from Lorraine Pouchet, the Chair of the NCC welcomes online viewers with the catchphrase, “Welcome to Trinidad and Tobago – The home of Carnival; the greatest show on Earth.” The site’s links give the viewer a brief history lesson taking them through the mas’, pan, calypso, regional information, the history of carnival (including the history of steel pan and calypso) and the Carnival Industry Program. The NCC has preserved these elements of the carnival, but from a visual standpoint, the images differ from those of the more popular sites.

23 Calypsonians are the people who sing calypso music.
While they attempt to contemporize the carnival, the NCC’s advertisements are more grounded in the community.

Image: Stick fighter as shown on the NCC’s website.

The above image, taken from the NCC’s homepage, depicts the traditional art form of stick fighting which has become associated with grassroots’ carnival. The picture here shows a man holding up a stick before him in a protective, rebellious stance – his playful smile however, decreases the seriousness of the scene and removes any thread or dread long associated with stick fighting. The art of stick fighting was “Introduced into Trinidad in the late eighteenth century by slaves from formerly French owned colonies…of Grenada, St. Vincent, and Dominica…” (Burton 174). Burton also notes that prior to the prohibition of stick fighting in 1884 (the ban was lifted in 1951), it was a significant part of carnival since emancipation and had been performed by members of
the lower class (174). Today the National Stick Fighting Competition is a paid event advertised by the NCC. The activity however, still has an undertone suggestive of the poor/grassroots community, and though the NCC promotes the event, and people turn up to these, it is not one of the most popular events, nor is it the most visible if one were to turn to media (newspapers, carnival websites) for an idea of what is carnival.

The poster for this year’s Stick Fighting Semi Finals Competition (advertised by the NCC) shows that tickets to the event are $50TTD and $100TTD for the Grand Finals, which is approximately $8USD and $16USD respectively. Compared to other paid carnival events, these prices are not ridiculously expensive and allow greater access to visitors to Trinidad and especially to members of the public. Also, the image used for the advertisement is not glamorized. It simply shows what you can expect to see – two people stick fighting. It is not polished to perfection like many of the images used to sell the more popular carnival (which I will show later). Like the image of the lone stick fighter, these images represent normal, everyday people. These are the people who, whether they are what they appear to be or not, represent the man in the street, or the woman selling vegetables on the street corner. They are the laypeople, and represent the heartbeat and fervour of those on ground. Similarly, some of the events promoted by the NCC are free to attend, several are $100TTD/ $17USD and under, and the remaining events do not cross $500TTD/ $84 USD (except for few rare instances where sections in events are reserved).
There are multiple carnival event calendars: one released by the NCC and several others produced by entertainment companies. The NCC’s gives an overview of the official carnival competitions and events. In addition to the stick fighting, these include (but are not limited to) calypso, steel pan and soca competitions (which are popular and attract a more varied crowd) and carnival exhibitions that typically showcase local arts and crafts. On the other hand, many of the other calendars that pop up at the start of the carnival season feature a barrage of events hosted by private entertainment committees and businesses, ranging in size and most certainly ranging in price, many of which considerably surpass the average price of the events promoted by the NCC.

Moreover, the ways they present the carnival parade and its costuming again favour tradition, and a contemporary mas’ that is more open to the public, or that expresses high levels of originality and creativity – something newer forms of mas’ are criticized for lacking. Under their section about “Mas,” the NCC addresses certain forms including The King and Queen of Carnival, D’ People’s Band, Traditional Mas Characters, Kiddies Carnival. They do not mention or show images of the mas’ that have undeniably continued to dominate the streets over the past two decades, the popular contemporary bikini and beads mas, that, despite its rising prominence, has grown too in notoriety as elders and “real” mas makers condemn the lack of ingenuity and the vulgarity of the sparse costumes particularly associated with this type of mas.

24 Launched in 2011, the People’s Band was a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism and the NCC. Anyone could join once they have created a costume of some sort.
Image: Traditional carnival character as shown on the NCC’s website.

Image: Kiddies Carnival as shown on the NCC’s website.
Another crucial component is copious representation of *Blackness* on the site. This may not be an intentional action by any means; however, its presence on the site, especially when compared to other carnival sites is thought-provoking. Almost all of the images spread across the website show masqueraders and performers of African decent. This hinges on remarks made about carnival as an Afro-Trinidadian affair having been aligned with the primarily Black politics that reigned prior to, and ushered, Trinidad’s independence. Referring to the 1950s, Burton notes:

> Although there was now some East Indian (and Chinese) participation in carnival, it remained an overwhelmingly Black-dominated event, and its virtual co-option by Eric Williams and his predominantly Black People’s National Movement as the epitome of Trinidadians when they came to power in 1956 merely underlined carnival’s – and the party’s – restrictive racial character…(206).

Likewise, John Stewart, in his work on the racial and ethnic relations in Trinidad from the 1950s onwards, notes the coalition of Blackness and carnival festivities. He argues that despite the competition among the races (especially African and Indian):

> The effort has been to cultivate a national cultural presence based on remnant traditions and contemporary elements from African, European, American, and Asiatic sources. Functioning as the stem for this cultural alliance is the broadly Afro-based Creole heritage, and nowhere is this pattern more clearly elaborated than in the carnival (297).
Although things have changed on the political front since Burton’s and Stewart’s study, in the sense that the predominantly Black government they steadily refer to now stands in opposition to a primarily Indo-Trinidadian party in power, the People’s Partnership (PP), this change does not seem to affect the agenda of the NCC based upon what they promote. This could be a result of the persons who head the NCC who are in fact, mostly of African decent, and hence seem to be unperturbed by external forces. Another argument I want to bring to the fore here is the possibility that this agenda is purposefully being left as is, while some people (across ethnicities) simultaneously contribute to the building of another agenda, one more aligned with the popular contemporary carnival, to define and validate class/social positions while dissociating themselves from a *Black* carnival of the past, in exchange for a “brown”\(^{25}\) carnival of the future.

### 2.2.2 TRIBE

TRIBE is a key model for popular contemporary carnival. As an events company, they provide services throughout the year but are primarily known for their presence during the carnival season and their influence on modern-day carnival expectations. Tribe attracts persons of all races and ethnicities, as seen at their events throughout the year and in their band on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. I want to focus on their online presence, in order to juxtapose what they represent with the Afro-centric, more old-style representations of carnival promoted by the NCC. Two main things that stand out when

\(^{25}\) The concept of *brownness* here is adopted from Edmondson’s use of the term as a signifier of the Caribbean middle-class.
the two different sites are compared are the visual aesthetics/costume designs and the people/models used to promote the various events.

In an excerpt from their “About Us” section, TRIBE declares:

TRIBE Carnival is Trinidad and Tobago’s Premiere Carnival Band, and has set a new standard for service in the Carnival Mas industry. TRIBE was the first fully all-inclusive carnival band in Trinidad & Tobago and has become the benchmark for service for Carnival Bands, not only in T&T but in Carnivals around the world. TRIBE prides itself on providing the Ultimate Carnival Experience in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival – one of the largest and most popular Carnivals in the world. TRIBE has revolutionized Trinidad and Tobago Carnival by introducing a standard of service and amenities found in all-inclusive holiday resorts and translating this to our local carnival experience.

TRIBE is an exemplar of popular contemporary carnival. The first thing you see on TRIBE’s website is imagery of women in shiny, skimpy costumes, a scene reminiscent of the annual Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, which features sexy lingerie and sleepwear.
The costumes shown in the image above are drastically different in aesthetic from those shown on the NCC’s website. Several scholars have written about this change in style and the implications that come along with this shift including English and Post-Colonial Literature scholar Raimund Schaffner, who writes:

The scene is now dominated by huge mas bands, often consisting several thousand participants, their costumes no longer self-made, but professionally manufactured. In these large-scale spectacles, traditional masks, individuality, and interaction between audience and participants have largely lost their importance. As the aesthetics of carnival – dance, music,
colours, beauty – have gained significance, its socio-political function and inversion of hierarchal structures have fallen into oblivion (191).

Hence, though the carnival we see promoted by the NCC is not entirely free from commercialism, it is less aggressive than the beautified and sexualized carnival promoted by TRIBE and similar carnival bands. What we see on these popular sites is the glamorized commodification of happiness defined by the availability of glamorous female bodies and an appetite for indulgence.

This is seen most in the shift to all-inclusive services, which TRIBE proudly promotes. Their all-inclusive events typically come at a high price (to cover costs and sustain profits) and take all of the patrons’ party wants and needs into consideration. For the lofty price tags, usually $600TTD/$100USD and up, patrons are promised – in addition to entertainment – food, drinks and an air of exclusivity. The more expensive the event, the more it is regarded as exclusive. Events sometimes exceed $800TTD/$133USD; these usually promise patrons a variety of foods, top shelf liquor and sections for pampering (hair stylists for touch-ups, massages etc.). Unlike the NCC’s events calendar, a look at TRIBE’s events emphasises this exclusivity that many other similarly private businesses promote. The NCC attracts a wide audience across socio-economic lines, but TRIBE tends to attract an upper-middle class and bourgeois Trinidadian audience. TRIBE’s target market is young professionals.

One example of their events advertised online is *TRIBE Ignite*, a premium drinks-inclusive party normally held on Carnival Thursday. The information for their 2015 event shows that a limited number of tickets for TRIBE masqueraders are $500TTD/ $83USD,
while tickets are $600TTD $100USD for non-masqueraders. Tickets are also available for purchase online, but these are set at $600TTD/ $100USD. Most importantly, if tickets are not purchased online, interested persons are directed to get them at the mas’ camp (TRIBE’s headquarters), or from one of its committee members\(^26\), who are carefully selected to attract potential patrons. This follows what Goffman describes as “Teams:” “A team, then, has something of the character of a secret society” (104). These people are usually outgoing and move in circles of people who can afford to be part of the in-crowd. These committees are teams committed to the brand of the entertainment companies, its marketing and success. Teams according to Goffman, “May be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained” (104). The practice of using teams, or committees as they are commonly referred to in Trinidad, for the purpose of promoting and selling tickets is becoming more and more visible. The practice is expanding throughout the region as some these committees have branched out across islands and even in North America, recruiting international brand ambassadors and magnify their fan/supporter base.

Unlike many of the events promoted by the NCC, for which interested persons go to a distributor, store or a box office for tickets, putting tickets into the hands of committee members changes the availability of tickets and the subsequent outcome regarding the crowd it attracts. In other words, unless you pay the price and get the tickets online (in which case you’ll sometimes still have to go through a committee member), or go to the mas camp, you often have to know the committee member, or know someone

\(^{26}\) These are persons who work for TRIBE (and similar events companies), even if only to help to promote the brand and distribute tickets.
who knows the committee member due to the demand of the event. This type of screening (intentional or not) is necessary for the smooth flow and regulation of large events. The practice merits consideration of the implications of these types of activities on what is still in the minds of many a festival ‘for the people’.

On the matter of prices, accessibility, exclusivity and the expansion of the practices of the “all inclusive experience,” the two-day parade that carnival traditionally culminates with has largely been taken over with this “all-inclusive” concept. TRIBE is known for its very high standard of service. They go above and beyond to meet the needs of their patrons and to ensure that their customers have a great time, especially on the days of the street parade or ‘on the road’, as it is commonly referred to. They’re proud to announce that they’re the first to introduce the all-inclusive carnival band experience to Trinidad Carnival. This has proven to be an excellent business decision as people’s interest in this service has certainly increased over the years; it is also an extremely convenient way to play mas as drinks and food are already paid for, thereby eliminating the hassle of having to find food along the parade route, and especially avoiding having to walk with money or bank cards. This is true also for all-inclusive events. Almost all the popular bands follow this pattern now. The innovation and expediency are notable. However, as I explain below, this convenience comes at a price.
First, costumes are very expensive. The image above is an example of the type of costumes that many of these bands are known for. These costumes, unlike many of the costumes associated with ole’ mas/traditional mas’, are shimmery and often accentuated with sequins and pretty feathers. They are clean and don’t involve the use of mud, oil and paint often associated with dirty mas’, hence the name pretty mas. Using this 2015 “Blush” costume as an example, female packages start at approximately $5000TTD/ $834 USD and can surpass $9000TTD/ $1500USD depending on how elaborate the individual wants their costume to be. Male costumes, which are usually cheaper and not as varied per section, start at $4000TTD/ $667USD. In 2010 minimum wage in Trinidad was $9TTD/ $1.50USD per hour; it was raised to $12.50TTD/ $2USD, and most recently
in January of this year (2015) to $15TTD/$2.50USD according to an announcement by the Minister of Finance, Senator the Honourable Larry Howai (Bagoo). About this phenomenon, Belinda Edmondson writes:

The diminution of ugly mas’ (footnote) and the expansion of pretty mas’ suggests a de-Africanizing of the festival, to conform to a more multicultural, middle-class sensibility that is both appealing to tourists and less historical, less-threatening – in both symbolic and actual terms. In particular, the heightened presence of certain kinds of women – middle-class, brown and nonblack women – wining and jamming on the streets has become a marker of three, not altogether compatible, views of Caribbean progress or lack thereof (131).

Edmondson articulates very clearly the main issue at the centre of this type of carnival. She fluently connects pretty mas with the Caribbean middle-class and highlights the importance of skin colour in the milieu of contemporary carnival.

2.3 Who are these Ads for? Agenda Setting, Framing, and the Audience

The crowds these two carnival types attract are not set in stone, in the sense that even though the traditional carnival typically tends to rouse the attention of older generations, and those looking for a free or more affordable carnival experience, there are also many younger persons who attend these festivities, and persons with financial power who enjoy the tradition and the rich culture of this type of carnival. Likewise, even
though the popular carnival caters primarily to persons with disposable income and is not as open to the public as it is sometimes perceived to be, if someone comes by the right amount of money and a good link to gain access, they too have a chance to participate. What the existence of contemporary carnival tells us, especially the emergence of popular contemporary carnival throughout the Caribbean and the diaspora, is that there is a very powerful and vibrant Caribbean middle-class whose ideologies, evident in the growing representation of carnival, influence the social and economic scene in the Caribbean.

At this juncture, I ask the question: Who are these advertisements really for? Denotatively, they are for everyone. These advertisements do not say, “You can only be a part of this event if you make X amount of money,” or “You cannot attend this event because you are too dark-skinned or too light-skinned.” They are put out there for interested persons to see; after all, at the crux of this is the aim of making a profit in keeping with the inevitable influences of global capitalism. However, many of these advertisements and promotional materials for carnival have subtle or not so subtle connotations. For example, whereas the NCC has a heavy Afro-Trinidadian presence in their online images, the pictures we see on websites like TRIBE’s tell a different story. As Edmondson notes, the correlation between “brown and nonblack” skin complexions and middle-class ideals have come to represent pretty mas’ (131) – unlike the Afrocentric imagery of the NCC. Additionally, describing modern-day Trinidad Carnival, Burton writes:

Carnival has been exoticized and commodified for foreign consumption, and Trinidadians allegedly confront it as tourists in their own land, estranged from the very festivity that is
supposed to embody the quintessence of what it is to be Trinidadian or even of what it is to be West Indian, or black (208).

Therefore, contemporary carnival, and I will argue both the traditional and popular forms, in addition to being advertised to locals, are also aimed at tourists, and more specifically, to whom Scher refers to as “tourists of themselves.” However, whereas Scher specifically focuses on people, or “natives” as they are called in the title, who have left Trinidad to live elsewhere returning as tourists for carnival, I contend that with the growing emphasis of a showy, resort-like carnival, even some locals experience carnival as tourists, buying costly tickets, custom made outfits for high end events, and even making hotel reservations and other bookings to better facilitate their week of events and non-stop partying. I want to examine the ways in which some local people are being driven to the periphery of carnival advertising and carnival itself, while other locals, and arguably, the middle-class enjoy center stage27.

A look at the NCC’s site further highlights their association with marketing and tourism as their objectives are as follows:

1. To make Carnival a viable, national, cultural and commercial enterprise;

2. To provide the necessary managerial and organizational infrastructure for the efficient and effective presentation and marketing of the cultural products of Carnival; and

27 The stage is the official judging point for many of the carnival bands and is for many masqueraders the highlight of the parade route as traditionally, that is where they perform most for the judges and spectators in the stands, and for those at home watching television.
3. *To establish arrangements for ongoing research, the preservation and permanent display of the annual accumulation of Carnival products created each year by the craftsmen, musicians, composers and designers of Carnival.*

However, based on the information on their site, it would seem that they are catering mostly to those who want a more rooted cultural experience, an experience closer to the community. On the other hand, the more popular sites (such as TRIBE etc.) appear to be catering to those who want to party and be part of the limelight carnival experience. Turning again to the texts, the websites for NCC and TRIBE, the well-known media studies theory of agenda setting is useful here to analyse what is being produced by these organizations. McCombs and Ghanem assert, “Agenda setting is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media’s pictures of the world to those in our heads;” they add, “…the media’s agenda sets the public agenda” (67). Simply put, agenda setting tell us what to think about; it literally sets the agenda.

Hence, the NCC highlights the importance of the traditional carnival showcasing its myriad elements and events. Moreover, one of their links, “Visit Trinidad and Tobago,” takes the online user to a Trinidad and Tobago tourism site. The site, with its picturesque ocean background promises the potential tourist the “perfect getaway.” There are few images of popular contemporary carnival, but all the information and further links about carnival, take the user back to events related to the NCC. The agenda here then, as aforementioned, is more connected to the grassroots experience, at least one more so than the popular contemporary kind, hence ultimately selling the clichéd Caribbean experience.
On the other hand, using agenda setting to gauge the salient message promoted by TRIBE shows something else. TRIBE, like many of its competitors, pushes a glamorized, luxurious carnival that promises a fun experience more so than a rich cultural/grassroots experience. The models they use are mainly female, and vary in shades – mostly light browns, and are made-up to perfection. These are not people who look like they are part of the working class; these people represent what Edmonton calls the “Caribbean Middlebrow.” She writes:

The actual population of mixed race people who inhabit the middle class notwithstanding, brownness is a central category for a discussion of middle-class Caribbean identity because it speaks directly to the middle-class issue of quasi-elite status and humble origins (7).

The people used in TRIBE’s advertisements are not holding up sticks in a defensive stance like the stick-fighter in the NCC’s page; these unmistakably young individuals, in keeping with specific cultural signifiers, represent professionals or at the least, up and coming professionals, if only based on the price tags they promote/ represent for many of the events and especially the process of purchasing tickets/ registering for carnival.

They promote partying as a leisure experience for the Trinidadian middle-class, but not just any type of partying – partying with others like themselves who can afford the all-inclusive experience. What they show are young, attractive people having a good time. The agenda here becomes less of a national cultural experience, and more of a partying with “the who is who” experience; it is about carousing in style and reaffirming one’s social standing. This can be seen as second-level agenda setting, or what those in
the field call framing. Sociology Professor, Diana Kendall defines framing “as an important way in which the media emphasize some ideological perspectives over others and manipulate salience by directing people’s attention to some ideas while ignoring others” (5). She also emphasises the importance of the media in constructing reality and representing class through frames (3-4). Basically, it is a niche experience that is rapidly becoming the norm. The elusive idea of experience becomes the selling point. As TRIBE’s slogan reminds us, it’s the “Ultimate Carnival Experience.” As I mentioned earlier, TRIBE meets the needs of their patrons and many have realized this and support their efforts. TRIBE is an exemplar of this and is by no means the sole provider of this experience. There are countless other event organizers who thrive from this service and this could be noticed by looking at the many event calendars that are circulated at carnival time.

TRIBE and many of these businesses do not have direct links to tourist information on their sites. Their services are top class, their websites are also welcoming and meet international standards; some might even argue that these sites look like they cater to an international or more specifically, a North American crowd, more than they do to a Trinidadian audience based on the models they use. This is a crucial point in my analysis, as it further shows that although these businesses welcome tourists and foreigners with open arms, they do not appear to be their main focus or target group.

Despite numerous warm welcomes, Trinidad is not your usual tourist destination in the Antilles. It is no secret that Trinidad has a wealth of resources; the success of the oil industry on the island has produced major economic effects. Referring to Trinidad and Tobago’s financial status in the region, Shannon Dudley writes, “Trinidad and Tobago is
one of the most prosperous nations in the Caribbean because of its petroleum reserves…” (6). Moreover, Green and Scher assert, “…the nationalization of the oil business industry in 1974 greatly enhanced government revenues and foreign exchange earnings as profits increased at a dizzying pace (13). Despite Trinidad’s reputation throughout the region as unrelent on tourism as its main economic engine, carnival still attracts thousands of tourists and returning ‘Trinis’ yearly.

2.4 The People in the Middle

It is easy for people outside of the Caribbean to imagine the region as an impoverished third-world space with a notoriously turbulent history of colonization and slavery. Its subsequent transition to a tourist destination because of its tropical climate, verdant vegetation, gorgeous blue seas, lengthy beaches and hospitable inhabitants is also well known. These descriptions suit many islands. Indeed, even the islands, like Trinidad, that are often quick to boast of its independent wealth and natural resources in the region. These perceptions of the islands are not altogether wrong, but often foster a stereotypical belief that all of the people there are all needy dependents. The reality is that these islands, including Trinidad, are disadvantaged in comparison to powerful countries such as the U.S. and Canada; however, another equally significant reality is that despite their unstable economies, there exists a prominent and influential middle-class on the islands.

Caribbean Sociologist Susan Craig, provides a detailed description of the situation of the Trinidadian middle-class as follows in *Contemporary Caribbean:*
...Capitalist industrialization has produced certain clear changes in the class structure of Trinidad and Tobago. While the broad correlation between poverty and blackness remains and the distribution of income has probably grown more unequal, there have been certain noteworthy modifications. The dominant class – the old planter-merchant oligarchy – has expanded to include the black political elite and a small, but rapidly growing, number of African and Indian businessmen who have often been able to profit from their political connection – the expansion in size of the professional/managerial stratum, and in the scopes of their activities, has brought this group into a closer alliance with capital – as managers, consultants and advisors, and interestingly as investors in transport, construction, real estate and retail stores, especially after 1973 with the influx of “petro-dollars.” (404).

Craig acknowledges the economic disparity among Trinidadians, but mentions something vital to this work – that is, the expansion of the dominant class, which is arguably the expansion of the middle class, as Edmondson refers to middle-class popular culture as “aspirational culture” (2).

Additionally, though Kendall refers to the American middle-class in the following statement, her description is applicable to the class situation in Trinidad. She writes:
One widely used model divides the middle class into two categories: the middle class itself, consisting of persons who have some college education and significant skills and work under loose supervision, and the upper middle class consisting of highly educated professionals and corporate managers. Some analysts identify a third middle-class category: the lower middle-class…(185).

The distinctions between upper-middle, middle and lower-middle class are less important in this argument, but does work to show the growth of an otherwise closed or limited group. This is a crucial factor in understanding how popular contemporary carnival has become the dominant carnival style. Cohen’s remarks about transformations in Notting Hill’s Carnival is supported by his observation of the Trinidad Carnival; he asserts:

Similar transformations occurred in Trinidad’s carnival when a frequently violent and subversive ethnic Afro-Caribbean celebration was elevated after Independence into a state sponsored, middle-class dominated, tourist-oriented, national event (138).

The middle-class national event Cohen talks about is what has become the carnival organized and promoted by the NCC. My proposition is that it is from that carnival that this popular carnival has emerged. It is fuelled by business and people’s increasing desire to “fit in with the popular,” explaining too its heavy influence on younger generations and, in Edmondson’s concept – aspirational culture. This popular carnival also facilities the recreating of the ethnic make-up of carnival, from a predominantly Black event to
more mixed participation, where even here the light skin and brown body have come to represent this group.

A major factor in the rise of popular carnival is globalization, and especially neoliberalism, defined by Johanna Bockman as “both an approach to government and a defining political movement today” (14). This allows freedom for individuals to operate businesses and subsequently maintain capitalism and the inevitable resultant inequalities. In his book, *Globalization and Neoliberalism: The Caribbean Context*, Thomas Klak maintains, “Two of the most common terms used to characterize current and emerging trends on the international scene are globalization and neoliberalism” (3), and Trinidad is not exempt. Klak further acknowledges globalization “as a tool of class power” (21). The social and economic make-up of Trinidad from plantation days, to small business owners and now a growing number of professionals, facilitates this economic disproportion. A small elite own the means of production locally, and the middle class with a range of incomes aspire to be that group while disassociating themselves from the increasingly marginalized plebeian class. One way this is done is through social events. Accordingly, the role of private business in carnival has largely changed the social activities and meaning of carnival.

Cohen asserts:

As the bulk of the carnival makers in Latin America, the Caribbean, New Orleans (USA) and in Notting Hill are not only poor but also disadvantaged descendants of former slaves, Carnival is categorized as ‘popular culture’, thus implicitly contrasting it with elite ‘high culture’, which is assumed to be
pure, aesthetic, functionless, sheer form, dethatched from politics (134).

Though this notion of carnival held some truth in its early formation in the islands, and some diaspora communities, and may still be how foreigners view the festival and its people, in Trinidad today, this is not precisely the case. The few humble mas’ makers notwithstanding, the majority of the carnival makers whose designs flood the streets, and event organizers, are properly situated in society where they can come by sufficient capital to compete with other popular carnival businesses and win targeted audiences. Many of them are not poor or disadvantaged people.

Furthermore, Stewart notes that carnival is a significant space for negotiating social standing. Discussing fetes and the role of events in Trinidad carnival, he adds:

The fete therefore becomes an arena in which Trinidadians both endorse themselves and exploit each other. One’s presence at a fete, while a satisfying experience in itself, may also produce and aggrandized awareness of oneself and one’s value to others (298).

This realization of oneself in society can be seen as emphasized through the means of gaining access to the events, especially the ‘exclusive’ events. The existence of committee members as aforementioned, for the purpose of promoting events and most importantly distributing event tickets is a reminder of one’s social standing. Moreover, how these events are promoted also informs the audience of what type of event it is – or more specifically, what type of crowd to expect. Shani Orgad reminds us that “representation is an active process of meaning production” (17); in other words,
whatever values are accentuated in the promotion these events will likely affect how they’re interpreted and the meanings and values people place on them. Intriguingly, this situation does not only bond locals; within the last few years, it has come to connect like-minded, like-stratum people from the other islands and other continents.

2.5 Tourists and “Tourists of Themselves”

“Carnival today is big business,” writes John Nunley in the graphically appealing Caribbean Festival Arts (85). This is evident when considering how much money some people spend during the carnival purchasing tickets for a list of events, buying outfits to wear to these events, and then paying to partake in the street festival. Stewart remarks upon the changes to the festival that have led it to become “a grand spectator event” causing a shift in participation:

Given the elaborate preparations required for the successful staging of events, spontaneous participation has all but disappeared from the festival, and there is limited participatory flow across the space that separates performance specialists from the audience (309).

Hence, popular carnival has reshaped carnival to cater primarily to persons with a comparably flexible income, and encourages splurging by locals who, in addition to enjoying the festivities, use carnival as means to show that they can afford the events and be a part of the activities. The type of performance here is twofold: while carnival culturally inspires a variety of performances of dancing or singing, some people also use this time to perform giving “their observers an impression that idealized in several ways”
Goffman alludes to this type of performance in his work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* whereby individuals often consciously portray an image for onlookers. Likewise, it has the same appeal to members of the diaspora, who, return home for fun in the sun and who get more for their money with their US and Canadian dollars, and English pounds. Noteworthy though, is how this is usually advertised and the cultural connotations often used to market the carnival as a reputable, valuable product. As Edmondson notes:

Trinidad has a relatively small tourist industry, and unlike the other islands, it is oil, not tourism that is its economic mainstay. Why, then, the profound investment in Americanization and what “they” think of “us”? The idealized tourist image is important because it allows Trinidadians to reimagine themselves as global citizens, as agents of a modern, transnational world” (132).

In the past, carnival tourism was not a major target, but with globalization and the flow of people and information across boundaries, its popularity as a tourist attraction has gained some attention. Edmondson’s statement above is particularly fascinating when put into the context of neoliberalism and its impact on the Caribbean psyche. If these carnival businesses want to stay relevant, they have to out beat the competition and make their packages desirable. More precisely, they must make their product desirable to the people who bring them the profit. Image management and marketing therefore become essential to the corporate/economic wellbeing. One way they seem to be doing this is by highlighting middle-class ideals, ideals largely adopted from an elite class and notions of
beauty perpetuated by international media to help sell the experience, and thus, the lifestyle. This is the “brown” aesthetic that Edmondson talks about and which can be seen on websites like TRIBE. Additionally, carnival is a leisure experience for the financially mobile Caribbean middle-class, a place to be a part of something with others like you and to use this as a means of asserting your economic position, whether accurately or falsely as people often try to ‘keep up with the Joneses’, to say you went to this event and to that, Carnival has become a kind of show and tell, in addition to the fun factor, and it has become even more prominent with the increase in media coverage, roaming photographers and personal updates to social media, to say that you were there.

Perhaps no other site better shows the emergent unification of the islands and diaspora spaces through the common celebration of carnival than Trinidad Carnival Diary (TCD). The name of the blog is self-explanatory; however, in a quite concise descriptor of the company, it reads:

Trinidad Carnival Diary TCD Limited is THE only place in the World Wide Web to get current and constant information about the World’s Greatest Festival, Trinidad Carnival and by extension the western diaspora.

On the homepage of the blog, there are photos of Trinidad Carnival, advertisements for Jamaica Carnival, Crop Over (aka Barbados Carnival) and the embryonic Hollywood Carnival among others. Hence, the blog does not only focus on Trinidad Carnival, but advertises and promotes other carnivals as well. Significant to this practice, is the fact that Trinidadians promote many of these other carnivals as well, and vice versa. Several of the people involved, such as bandleaders, designers, and event promoters, do not only
operate their businesses locally in Trinidad, but take their businesses to other carnivals and/or endorse others there, who in turn endorse them.

Image: A snap of the homepage of TCD’s website.

In the image above, there is an advertisement for Hollywood Carnival 2015, while the two bottom images (full images shown in image below) advertise Crop Over (Barbados Carnival). On the bottom right, TCD asks online users “Which district do you belong to? Zulu International presents The Hunger Games for Crop over 2015,” mimicking *The Hunger Games* trilogy with their 2015 theme, while the picture on the right advertises another carnival band for Crop Over. In the image below, a banner promotes Jamaica Carnival.
XHOSA, one of the newest carnival bands shown in the image above (middle right) is described by TCD as “the brainchild of a team of young professionals who are promising to revolutionize the carnival celebration experience of Crop Over…” It goes on to say that the group includes “distinguished partners” from Jamaica and Trinidad – persons already aligned with a steady fan-base and years of experience in the entertainment and party industries. They also promise to offer a “first class masquerade experience.” Unquestionably these are great developments to the carnival as up and coming carnival enthusiasts take the baton from the older generations and continue the longevity of the carnival while strengthening inter-island ties. As TCD writes about XHOSA, for instance, “Xhosa Barbados’ mission is to be a leader in the festival sector by unifying the different peoples of the Caribbean for one goal under the theme One Sun.” The popularity of this type of cross regional carnival is mounting, and changes the way
many people experience carnival. Though on one hand, it does facilitate the unification of people from different islands and countries in and out of the Caribbean region, it also highlights the segregation between the haves and the have-nots and ironically negates the idea of “all of we is one” – a notion rooted in the Caribbean carnival and one so full of the potential to curb even a little the demands of capitalism and societal inequalities.

Image: Section “Verge” from XHOSA’s 2015 presentation One Sun.
In concluding this chapter, the Trinidad Carnival, and as we saw, many of the carnivals in and out of the region, are progressively controlled by the private sector. In Trinidad, the festival is made up of a series of events. While some are more old-fashioned and traditional in nature, others, and as I argued, the more popular events, are newer, lavish, and suited for ‘kings’ and ‘queens’, those within a certain economic bracket who can afford the lofty lifestyle that the popular contemporary carnival often portrays.

Whereas in the past the organizers and designers of the Trinidad Carnival were perceived to be poor, disenfranchised members of society, these individuals are quickly being replaced by people who have the necessary means and social connections to compete and prosper locally, regionally and even internationally. The information put forward by many influential carnival sites shows this trend, and observing the actual activities during carnival makes noticeable how people are being marginalized from the carnival. More specifically, they help to show what is promoted, and by how it is crafted, who these events are catered to.

The privatization of many of the events, including the costumed street parade indicates the increase of all-inclusive events and the spread of the committee format for brand management and sales. Though carnival remains a staple of Trinidadian culture, the changes, especially the increasing focus on exclusivity, show the influence the dominant class has on national festivals, and highlights the growing shift from a carnival for the people, to a carnival for the people with money.
Chapter 3

Women, Sexualisation, and the Pervasive Spectacle of the Carnival Body

Within a predominantly patriarchal, heteronormative space, and with the common perception that “sex sells,” it is no great shock that the female body has come to symbolize Trinidad Carnival. Likewise, with the increase in carnival’s commerciality, it is unsurprising that carnival and a display of sexuality are intimately interwoven. Linden Lewis, editor of *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* firmly declares, “There is a strong correlation between sexuality and popular culture in the Caribbean” (7). Lewis does not give a distinct reason for this correlation, but rather insinuates that it is a cultural practice rooted in misogynistic, hyper-masculine tendencies. He adds, “What is remarkable, however, is how easily many have all come to accept the juxtapositioning of sex and violence in the culture of the Caribbean” (9). A connection between carnival, sexuality and the female body is evident in almost every element of carnival, whether it is the music, masquerade, other social events, and especially through its promotional material.

Crucial to this discussion is the knowledge of the concept of the carnival body. I define the carnival body as belonging primarily to the young, fit and mobile. For women, it is an almost unattainable beauty ideal in accordance with mainstream heteronormative beauty expectations for women. Although men and women both sport carnival bodies, women are the ones whose bodies are more visible through the blatant media emphasis on females during carnival. Furthermore, the female carnival body most advertised and popularized in Trinidad is light-skinned and mixed race. Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s
description of the women typically seen in hip-hop music videos is applicable to the women primarily used by popular carnival businesses to promote their brand, and by extension, to represent Trinidad Carnival. Sharpley-Whiting writes:

…The majority of these women represent what historian Tiffany Patterson calls “ascrptive mulattas,” that is, those whose physical beauty transcends characteristics such as darker hues, full lips, and the like, historically prefigured as less than ideal (non-European) (27).

The constant overrepresentation of the female carnival body, often excessively sexualized, has many implications. Not only does this practice support patriarchy, and the objectification and misogynistic treatment of women, but also it persuasively affirms the islands as a sensualized, sexualized paradise, as these women’s bodies implicitly invite people to Trinidad (for carnival). Moreover, by highlighting a certain type of Caribbean woman, the people who have power to control discourse on the island, assist in promulgating a narrow view of beauty, by especially denying the value of blackness/African features. This chapter addresses the overt sexualisation present in modern Trinidad Carnival media through the practice of using female bodies to market carnival, particularly the masquerade. Furthermore, I analyse the transposing of the Caribbean body to the carnival body, an archetype that looks more North American and European than Caribbean.
3.1 “Thirty Gyal to One Man:” Women’s Prolific Presence in the Trinidad Carnival

Carnival is quickly approaching. The island is engulfed with high energy and ceaseless conversations about the barrage of lively carnival bands, their various costume offerings, new music releases and hot fetes for the season. You’ve waited all year and don’t want to miss out on the action, so you go online to peruse carnival band websites to finally decide on the right band and costume for you. When you get there, the welcoming faces of females modeling skimpy costumes greet you, holding the promise of a “good time” between their breasts. Maybe you stop to think: Why do all the models look the same? Where are the plus size women? Where are the older men? Wait...where are the men? Or, maybe, you do not think these things. Regardless, you dismiss the seemingly senseless pondering and continue your search.

Above is a typical scenario for many locals and foreigners who, due to the great demand by patrons for pretty costumes, have to organize well in advance to secure their costume of choice before it is sold out. However, what really captures the online users’ attention is not the variety of overpriced costumes, but the overwhelming presence of female models. Women have become indisputably representative of carnival. In their work on women in Rio de Janeiro Carnival, Brazil, Lewis and Pile write, “Carnival is profoundly gendered” (25); the same can be said about the Trinidad Carnival. Whereas our perception of carnival is a time to challenge social norms, or as Bakhtin popularly

28 Carnival bands are privately owned businesses that design, make, and sell costumes to fit their individual themes annually.
described it as a period of role reversal, in Trinidad, the carnival is just another season to live out and even emphasise norms, including the different gender roles of men and women.

The picture that I have painted at the opening of this section exemplifies this gender divide. Women are, time and time again, used as pawns for economic gain. It is an all too familiar sight – the strategic placement of a female sex symbol in an advertisement for a product unrelated to sex. Despite many of the women in these advertisements being educated and/ or assertive, they are stripped of those qualities and sexually objectified to attract buyers. Hence, men are encouraged to be seen as active, looking, and to desire the woman, while women are traditionally socially schooled to be passive, to be looked at, and to be desired (sexually) by men.

Perhaps most important, is the type of woman that is most valued by these advertisements, further adding to the inequality and discrimination found in media representations of Trinidad Carnival. For this analysis, I have chosen still shots from popular carnival band websites: TRIBE, Island People, Fantasy, and Yuma to investigate meanings regarding gender and representation in popular contemporary Trinidad Carnival.

3.1.1 Gender and the Caribbean Context

Before I begin my analysis of carnival texts for this chapter, I will establish an understanding of gender relations in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. In her enticing book, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*, which focuses on sex work
in the Caribbean, Kamala Kempadoo uses the term *heteropatriarchal* to help contextualize the Caribbean region. “Heteropatriarchal”, Kempadoo states:

…Denote[s] a structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes. This structuring principle privileges men’s experiences, definitions, and perceptions of sexuality, whereby not only are appreciations of female (hetero) sexuality obscured, but homoeroticism and same-gender sexual relations are denied legitimacy (9).

Kempadoo’s description is especially helpful in that it elucidates a key part of my argument about female representation in media portrayals of popular carnival bands, namely, the recognition of a structured system that influences and normalizes social behaviours, including gender expectations.

Referencing Kempadoo’s quotation, while male promiscuity is commonly pardoned, the same cannot be said about female sexual behaviour. Hence, the power relation is evident; women are still in many ways oppressed, even if informally. As is the case in patriarchal societies, men are the sex who generally have greater control over and advantage of resources. Hilbourne Watson, whose essay, “The Globalization of the Discourse on Gender and Its Impact on the Caribbean,” enunciates the issue of gender inequality, writing:
At its core, patriarchy is a system that normalizes and rationalizes the reproduction of inequality for men and women. Masculinity conditions patriarchal “imaginary networks of power” and culture: hegemonic masculinity keeps patriarchy flexible and adaptable (55).

If we take hegemonic masculinity into account, it becomes clearer why representations of women outnumber those of men in organizations’ efforts to sell carnival, and more specifically, their products and services. Take for instance, Rafael Ramirez’ assertion that, “Asymmetrical relations are established when the masculine domain is privileged with the consequent subordination and devaluation of the female domain” (237). Ramirez, in “Masculinity and Power in Puerto Rico,” reinforces the dichotomous nature of the sexes through his analysis of separate male and female spheres. Furthermore, the concept of “machismo” which he uses in his articulation of the aggressive, hyper-sexed male (8), a well-known stereotypical characteristic of Caribbean men, can be used to explain the practice of treating women like objects to be conquered, and can be applied to the disproportionate exposure and exploitation of women’s bodies in media. Hence, there is an obvious incongruity in the way female sexuality is treated; while society systematically subdues female sexuality, it shamelessly exposes the female body.

3.1.2 Women in Carnival

Despite the prolific presence of females in the festival, women were not always the faces of carnival. As stated in previous chapters, carnival has transformed immensely over the years, and continues to do so. In chapter one, I introduced the role of the jamette
in the late nineteenth – mid-twentieth century (page 7). Jamettes, as Samantha Noel highlights in her article, “De Jamette in We: Redefining Performance in Contemporary Trinidad Carnival,” were among the first women in the Trinidad Carnival. The word *jamette* refers to Black, working class women, who were seen as troublesome to social order, especially as they danced liberally in the streets. Hence, they were disregarded and disrespected for the threat their *Black* bodies posed to respectability and the social order. Noel states: “Because the writhing of their bodies was viewed as indecent, the jamettes were historically seen as abominations by the authorities and by members of the elite during the colonial period” (60).

Garth Green and Philip Scher, co-editors of *Trinidad Carnival*, explain women’s increased visibility in carnival: “The coming and prominence of women in Carnival is tied to the economic and social expansion of Trinidadian society following World War II” (17). When more women began to participate in carnival, their presence became less of an “abomination.” Noel argues that this re-signification of women in carnival was a direct result of the involvement of the ethnic diversity of the women participating by the 1960s and 70s, several of whom were from the prospering middle-class (60). The ethnic diversity Noel refers is the “lightening” of the crowd and participants. In other words, the middle class was more ethnically and racially diverse, included people of lighter complexions, and therefore, regarded as more respectable and acceptable.

With the shifting participation and the economic and ethnic changes to carnival, the aesthetics of the costuming evolved greatly. Women were seen parading in skimpier, shinier costumes, a phenomenon that persists to date. Natasha Barnes, whose work about women in carnival predates and inspires this work, remarks:
The collusion of global capitalism in the marketing and commodification of Caribbean popular culture has limited the extent to which women’s sexual play in Carnival can be seen to be emancipatory or resistive (96).

The above scenario is particularly the case in modern-day carnival. The lack of the Jamette’s rebelliousness in today’s women in carnival is even more pronounced when certain women are selectively chosen by several of the popular carnival bands to model costumes. The practice of choosing certain women propagates the notion of an ideal Trinidadian/Caribbean woman by accentuating specific physical attributes and qualities such as sexiness and softness culturally affiliated with middle-class femininity. Many of the images used by carnival bands to promote and sell their annual costumes showcase models, the majority of whom are female, wearing varying designs. These practices, and the prescribed beauty standards by which they are informed, restrict the egalitarian potential of Carnival. Carnival therefore, as a space for mass public involvement, and with its affective cultural drive, is not effectively being used as an efficient tool to challenge discriminatory social norms.

3.1.3 The Carnival Model

The incessant use of female bodies by carnival band organizers to promote their bands and events is significant to the image of Trinidad Carnival. Plastered on websites and on other promotional materials, women’s faces and bodies are often the first visual indicators of the festival. In fact, a simple Google image search of Trinidad Carnival
conclusively demonstrates that the bejewelled woman is the key representative of Trinidad Carnival.

Considering that in the history of carnival females have only recently dominated the street parade (Franco 25), the phenomenon of increased female participation is remarkable as it directly reflects the growing independence of Caribbean women and their desire not only to do things on their own, but also to be a part of and occupy traditionally male spaces. At the same time however, it shows society’s hold on women. While women are stepping out more into the public domain with their increasing involvement in carnival activities, many carnival businesses focus on exploiting the female body and heteronormative femininity.

Compounded by carnival’s rapidly growing commerciality, businesses have not shied away from sexualising women’s bodies as a means of attracting a heterosexual male audience, and getting a female audience to identify. The sexy images of young, attractive women striking poses and modeling revealing costumes reflect normalized beauty ideals which both men and women are taught to desire. Whereas men generally are supposed to want the women who have this prescribed look, women have a tendency to want to be like those women. This is problematic because we are already overwhelmed with similar images by the mainstream media selling us products and services daily. The Trinidad Carnival, something culturally indigenous to Trinidad, should not dissolve into another space that enforces these limiting standards of beauty and acceptance which threaten authentic creativity, longstanding traditions, individual self-expression and self value only to create a generic, culturally non-specific look, void of any Caribbean detail.
3.2 Spotlight on Sexuality

Using models to advertise carnival costumes, and even events, is now a common practice. Observing the trend of carnival models, one can deduce that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are all good-looking, sexually appealing, and fit – especially the women. Along with a handful of young, muscular men, they exemplify the ideal Trinidadian bodies. These representations of the body are not only informed by popular, dominant ideologies of the human body, and in particular women’s bodies, but are also responsible for producing beliefs and fostering certain behaviours about which body types are valued, and which are not. Below are images from carnival bands: TRIBE, Fantasy, Island People and Yuma. They present a relatively unvaried representation of ethnicity and body types in Trinidad and Tobago, whilst quite literally situating female sexuality under a magnifying glass\(^29\).

\(^{29}\) Online users can zoom in and out of the available images, getting up close and personal with the models, who in any cases, have on very little.
TRIBE 2015

Image 1: Pages 2-3 of the costume booklet – all women.

Image 2: Pages 4-5 of the costume booklet. A single woman – a single man is less likely to occupy a similar page.
Image 3: Pages 6-7 of the costume booklet – slim, shapely women.

Image 4: Pages 8-9 of the costume booklet. One of few male models spotted, accompanied by two female counterparts.
Image 5: Pages 10-11 of the costume booklet – examples of the “brown woman” or “ascriptive mulatta.”

Image 6: Pages 12-13 of the costume booklet.
Fantasy 2015

Image 7: Model showing off the section, “City of Angels.”

Image 8: Models for the section, Black Swan.
Island People 2015

Image 9: Section, “Hakan” – displays five female shots and one male shot.

Image 10: One of the banners for the homepage and a voluptuous female model.
Image 11: Another image from the homepage…”Welcome Home” strategically placed above the model’s bosom.

Image 12: Another home page image, “Join Us…” How can we refuse to join? Look at the women who await
Yuma 2015

Image 13: Image of the “Costumes” Page. Though this band has male costumes, this particular image does not suggest that.

Image 14: Models for the section, “Jaipur” – Buff male model, slim, curvy female model.
These still shots are from four different carnival band websites, but they all have something in common. The commonality is the intentional allure of the female model to sell their product. These women however, do not represent the vast majority of women who partake in carnival; they are, as aforementioned, very carefully selected to represent the brands. Nor do they represent the men who also pay for costumes and parade the streets on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. In *Codes of Advertising*, media scholar Sut Jhally writes:

Advertisement images are neither false nor true reflections of social reality because they are in fact a *part* of social reality. Just as gender displays are not true or false representations of real gender relations, neither are advertisements true or false representations of real gender relations or ritualised gender displays – they are *hyper-ritualisations* that emphasise some aspects of gender displays and de-emphasise others. As such, advertisements are part of the whole context within which we attempt to understand and define our own gender relations. They are part of the process by which we learn about gender.

(135).

If as Jhally writes, advertisements “are part of the process by which we learn gender,” these images tell a rather partial story. Apart from the minor details such as the heavy make-up, all of the models are slim and fit, women who, because of their “ideal” size are considered sexy and attractive. It is also important to address how these women are portrayed and what types of women are used as representative of the carnival body.
3.2.1 Sexualisation and Objectification

Sexualisation and objectification go hand in hand. These models have become crucial tools in the competitiveness of carnival costume marketing. Regardless of the style and grandeur of the costumes, using models has become an apparently irreversible trend to attract potential customers and peddle costumes. Due to the competitiveness of the carnival band industry in Trinidad, many of them put serious efforts into presenting as the best of the best. Therefore, it is not unusual for these groups to host screenings where potential models (or brand ambassadors as they may be), are asked to show up wearing swimwear so their bodies can be more thoroughly inspected for blemishes and physical deformities.

This process, though perhaps reassuring to those whose bodies “make the cut” or pass the test, is potentially rather crippling to the self esteem of those who do not meet the recommended beauty standards, and also to some of those who will later see these models wearing costumes they too would like to wear. It is a practice that boldly reinforces the unattainable beauty myth sanctioned by the international fashion industry. The common practice of choosing the models, as described above, is already a form of objectification. Models are chosen or discarded based strictly on their physical attributes. Although it is paid work, since these models have a job and they are paid for their time and service, the types of products that are subsequently produced are worthy of feminist media critique.

Lewis and Pile write about the Rio Carnival:

…we believe that the subversive potential of the parade has been re-placed by its eroticism. This eroticism has been
facilitated by the introduction of elaborately “uncostumed” paraders – but especially signified by the uncostuming of the female body (26).

Lewis and Pile address an important topic regarding the modification of costuming over the years. They make reference to the “uncostuming” of masqueraders, a phenomenon that is also being experienced in the Trinidad Carnival. Participants are less likely to be topless in the Trinidad Carnival than in the carnival in Rio, but there has been a definite decrease in apparel in the Trinidad Carnival, a situation that Natasha Barnes equates to the Rio Carnival in her essay “Notes on Women and Spectacle in Contemporary Trinidad Carnival.” In the essay she mentions the “Rio-styled Carnival pageantry in which spandex and string bikinis dominate” (93), and this costume trend is prominent in the images above from popular carnival band websites. These portrayals of scantily clad women appeal to stereotypical male sexual fantasy.

The images from the websites show the ways women (and men, to a far lesser extent) are sexualized in popular carnival media representations. Some of the most influential writings on gender representations in media come from Laura Mulvey and Erving Goffman. Mulvey, whose essay “Visual Pleasure And Narrative Cinema” provides a gendered lens through which we can understand power relations within media representations, can naturally be applied to an analysis of the images above. Similar to Teresa De Lauretis’ assertion that “even when it is located in the woman’s body…sexuality is perceived as an attribute or property of the male” (14), Mulvey argues that there is “erotic pleasure in film” (14). Hence, though women are more visible in popular carnival media representations, I see it as less of an advantage on their part, in the
sense of sexual affirmation, and more of a practice that establishes and maintains male sexual hegemony where sexualized female bodies are subordinate. Although her analysis is of film, Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze is applicable to the still image as the ways the women are positioned and styled, emphasise their erogenous body parts and have a greater sexual appeal to a male audience.

For instance, in several of the images above, the models cater primarily to the male gaze and can be seen contorting their bodies to appear more sexy by elongating their spines, projecting their hips, and even touching themselves – something Goffman refers to as the “Feminine touch” in Gender Advertisements. Additionally, the obvious female to male ratio of the models is suggestive too of the power dynamic intrinsic to these visual representations of carnival. The image of sexualized women outnumbering the men is a direct illustration of male sexual prowess that is often also reflected in carnival music and in individual performances at carnival events and in the street parade.

The images also show the women in ways that the men simply are not shown. For example, in images 11 and 12, there are close-up shots of the women’s breasts and lips, further eroticizing an already sexualized image. In image 9, the buttocks of a female model is shown in a way that a male model would not be expected to pose, maintaining a notion of heteronormativity, in which female subordination is normalized. Obviously these women have a function, and that is to show-off the costume the best they can. This is the denotative function. The connotative function is to sell carnival through the promise of unbridled sex. Hence, it makes sense that the businesses would provide these images and even zoom in on some parts of the costume/body to highlight the delicate
details that costumers are likely to be interested in seeing up close. However, what do these images have to do with a national cultural festival?

These representations divide members of society through the lack-of representation of some members of society. Who the media show and the features they highlight are often what are typically valued as good-looking and attractive. Advertisers want to ensure that they are successfully seducing an audience to want to partake in carnival. By doing this, they follow prescribed beauty ideals which unfortunately exclude many types of people. The majority being older citizens, people who are not slim or athletic built, darker-skinned individuals (or not too many at once). Due to the popularity of these carnival bands, and the number of young people they attract, this type of portrayal of the carnival has become customary. I like Natasha Barnes’ assertion that:

When cable television networks make images of Carnival revellers available to global audiences, what is delivered in these screens, devoid of history and context are parades of scantily clad, gyrating women that appear to market the island and it’s culture as a destination for sex tourism (96).

Barnes’ critique of a decontextualized carnival, in which the history is lost in the artificiality and erotic displays showed via several media, is noteworthy. It pushes the argument that not enough is being done to cultivate a carnival that is free from these limiting portrayals that unashamedly deny other aspects of Trinidadian identity. Understanding that as time changes, so too will culture, this does not negate the fact that even as carnival becomes commoditized, it does not necessarily have to become shallow.
A downside of the sexualized representation of the carnival and its participants is that it is an indirect yet ubiquitous reflection of the island, which concretizes a long held stereotype of the Caribbean. As Kamala Kempadoo notes:

To many, the Caribbean continues to be an unruly and promiscuous place. Territories that once served as sex havens for the colonial elite are today frequented by sex tourists, and several of the island economies now depend upon the region’s racialized, sexualized image (1).

Though Kempadoo refers especially to sex tourism here, she makes a crucial point – the islands comprise a perceivably romanticized location, where sexual fantasies are fulfilled. These islands have since found ways to monopolize the perception of the hypersexual ‘Other’ for economic gain. This is currently the case in Trinidad as many of the songs and visual images affiliated with carnival emphasise this erotic element.

The ‘Other’ then is naturalized in Trinidadian society. Stuart Hall defines naturalization in culture as the “representational strategy designed to fix ‘difference’, and thus secure it forever” (245). Hence, just as the ideal body is naturalized, the sexual characteristic of carnival and its people is also naturalized, and partially functions to draw a distinction between the rigid lifestyle of people in first world countries and the easy-going nature of those in the tropics.

On one hand, while there is internal ‘othering’, whereby natives ‘other’ natives based on cultural specificities such as skin colour, class and so on, as a group, with carnival visuals becoming a central identifier of Trinidadian culture, the island’s
inhabitants are also ‘Othered’. Marketing the sexual characteristics of its people does not advance the region; rather, it detracts from the developmental potential of the islands and stimulates a narrow, insubstantial view of what it has to offer. Kempadoo posits, “Exoticism valorized peoples and cultures that were different and remote, concomitantly imposing a status of inferiority upon them” (35). In this way, men continue to be represented as hypersexual and promiscuous; women, especially being synonymous with carnival, simultaneously bear the burden of symbolizing the nation and symbolizing sex. Hence, it should come as no surprise that foreigners, particularly males, come to Trinidad during carnival looking for and expecting sexual pleasures.

3.3 The Era of the Carnival Body

In Trinidad, there is a peculiar situation where nationals ‘Other’ themselves by establishing a standard of beauty few people can actually attain, and a standard of beauty that is heavily influenced by Western ideology and foreign media. The body is a critical signifier in carnival advertising, its representation extending beyond the individual to express the practices of a group of people. Analysing the use of the body in carnival advertising is helpful in understanding cultural practices in Trinidad. Turning to the familiar work of Erving Goffman, Chris Shilling writes about the body:

Body management is central to the smooth flow of encounter, the acting out of roles and, more generally to a person’s acceptance as a full member of the interaction order. In Goffman’s work, this acceptance is also vital to a person’s self-identity as a competent and worthwhile human being (75).
Therefore, many of the images of carnival that flood the media throughout the year, and specifically nearing the carnival period have an important function in the psyche of the Trinidadian people. Shilling adds:

It is generally the case that if a person’s bodily appearance and management categorizes them as a ‘failed’ member of society by others, they will internalize that label and incorporate it into what becomes a ‘spoiled’ self-identity (75).

Hence, the images we see of near perfect bodies potentially have negative effects on some of the people who see themselves as inadequate and inferior to the fantasy bodies of Carnival models. These models have been airbrushed and photo-shopped, and presented as ideal. The images encourage the average person to think that they have to conform to that prescribed look of perfection, an unrealistic standard of beauty. The increasing sexiness of the costumes is another crucial factor, but the sexiness of the costumes is not necessarily a bad thing. They can signify empowerment and sexual agency. Sexual agency can be implied in more reputable and respectable means however, and does not necessarily have to be exposed in such provocative ways, as is the regular practice.

The images taken for granted as fun and welcoming may also be doing more harm than good in terms of what they say to locals and especially to the foreigners who know little about Trinidad or Carnival. In other words, we have given into popular representations and expectations of the islands which, while promoting the islands, sets us back by re-establishing unoriginal stereotypes of Caribbean people while appropriating Western ideals of beauty. Members of the public criticize this common practise continuously without any changes being the apparent outcome, implying that dominant
ideology, once established, is almost impossible to dismantle. These popular carnival bands are trendsetters, not only for carnival, but also for everyday life.

Goffman reminds us that, “The task of advertisers is to favourably dispose viewers to his product, this means, by and large, to show a sparkling version of that product in the context of glamorous events” (26). What, according to these images, are desirable characteristics or behaviours? Apart from being slender in size, one thing I observed is that all the women in the above images, across all four bands, have long curls. This aesthetic is not particularly widespread in the Caribbean as varying hair types means varying hair styles, especially for some Black women of African descent whose hair unlike, Caucasian or Indian hair for examples, does not grow long past their shoulders, but rather kinks into a fro. The desire to have and show long curls is much like what Sharpley-Whiting describes about hip-hop models, “…The vast majority of the young women in these videos are either fairer-skinned, ethnically mixed, or of indeterminate ethnic/racial origins, with long, straight or curly hair…(27). Having long hair is suggestive of whiteness, and as Sharpley-Whiting writes, the ideal woman is mixed; her Blackness implies her sex appeal, and her whiteness makes her beautiful (28).

This issue of hair is critical and current in the Caribbean, as old traditions of self hate still persists for many, and the legitimization of certain elements of blackness have not completely been formally (or informally) established. For instance, recently in Barbados, an island close to Trinidad, there was massive outcry at the announcement of a
ban on a popular natural hairstyle known as the “twist out”30 at a local secondary school. The story became quite popular across neighbouring islands. The Jamaican Gleaner was one of several newspapers to carry the story, “The school has reportedly said that the hairstyle is not appropriate for school” (Johnson). This opinion boldly discriminates on the basis of hair types, which in this case is based on race, as persons from other ethnicities are likely to wear their hair in equivalent styles. Going to school in the Caribbean, I have seen similar incidents where some students were allowed to style their hair in certain ways while others were not. For instance, female students with “softer” hair (non-Black) could wear their hair out, while dreadlocks and afros, and other styles similar to the style in image 15, typically worn by Black students, were known to cause some annoyance to administration.

30 The twist out describes a hairstyle that can be done with most textures of hair, but is particularly popular among people of African decent. The hair is divided into many plaits or twists, and then let out to create a crimpy effect. It’s a popular look among naturalistas – people whose hair is not chemically treated.
Image 15: Elva Tudor’s photo of the “twist-out”, taken from the Jamaica Gleaner’s website.

Young Black women, especially dark skinned Black women, already have limited role models in the media. Something as mainstream and as culturally significant as carnival, which puts the spotlight on women, could do more to uplift Black women whose features are habitually overlooked or made fun of. Instead, all the models look like the same fruit from a branch of a single tree. Even when they use darker skinned Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian women, these women tend to have features more akin to the “ascriptive mulattas” – narrow noses and thinner lips, for example. Where is the diversity? Where is the diversity in the media representations from a country that proudly broadcasts its rich multiculturalism?
An equally noteworthy observation about the carnival body is the emphasis placed upon light-skinned women. Light-skinned women in the Caribbean have a reputation of being regarded as “more attractive” than dark-skinned women. In “Race, Gender and Politics of Skin Tone,” Margaret Hunte notes of darker-skinned African Americans and Mexicans in America:

The long history of skin color stratification for both of these groups has its roots in their colonization and enslavement by Europeans. Europeans and white Americans created racial hierarchies to justify their subhuman treatment of the people of color they colonized and enslaved. This was the beginning of the ideology of white supremacy. (2)

The history of slavery and color stratification Hunte addresses above, being so similar to the Caribbean has resulted in comparable results in the latter.

These women, who Belinda Edmondson refers to as “brown” in the chapter “Middlebrow Spectacle and the Politics of Beauty” in her book Caribbean Middlebrow, have colour enough to be seen as sexual and exotic, but are light enough to be seen as cultured and respectable, based on cultural conventions of skin colour in the Caribbean. She writes:

The symbolic positioning of brown women provides some insights into how the nationalist project has attempted to fuse the indigenous and “primitive” with visions for national progress in the postindependence era (114).
As seen in the images that I have provided of the carnival models, this is still a common practise. Images 12 and 13, pages 16 and 17 respectively show varying shades of women, but most of who are not very dark-skinned. They show a spectrum of light-browns, but all interestingly have long bouncy hair and very slender features, signs that hair and other characters are also valued differently. When popular carnival bands make these images mainstream, they legitimize certain looks over others. The idea of a carnival body is well known on the island. Trendy articles and blogs talk about the carnival and often give readers tips and steps to follow to attain this look. The carnival body is similar to the “summer body” encouraged by Western media encourage. *Trinidad Carnival Diary*, the go-to carnival blog for what is trending, started to profile their picks for the “Best Carnival Body” segment in 2013.

In closing, while Trinidad Carnival continues to attract attention around the world as a festival worth attending, there have been interesting things occurring on the island that if left alone, could change carnival and our impression of ourselves as Trinidadian and Caribbean people forever. Its success has motivated many to get involved in the carnival business, and the female body and her sexuality have become key to the marketing strategies involved. While men and people of all ages and races enjoy carnival, the most frequently seen model, or representative of the carnival is a sexy young woman. The constant use of this type of female has created a standard of beauty that unfairly represents Trinidadians. The very act of continuously promoting lighter-skinned women with more European features over darker-skinned women in a country like Trinidad, where the population is made up predominantly of Afro and Indo-Trinidadians is an act
of insolence. Trinidadians could do a lot more to uplift its people, and celebrate the
diversity that makes it the unique place that it is.
4 Conclusion

The Trinidad Carnival continues to be a staple celebration on the island’s calendar of events. Already, plans are underway for Carnival 2016. Band launches started in June, and some bands have even begun the registration process for mas’. As always, people are eager for Carnival 2016, looking forward to the carnival with great joy and excitement. The same advertising practices that I discussed in this thesis have continued, however, and change does not seem to be in sight.

At the beginning of this research I asked three fundamental questions. How has the commercialization of Trinidad Carnival affected its cultural significance? And, how does Trinidad carnival, as a national symbol marginalize certain groups and individuals? What are the implications of the overrepresentation of women in Carnival media? Having lived in Trinidad and experiencing carnival first-hand as a spectator, masquerader, and working behind the scenes, I relied on my lived experiences to help inform this thesis. I also consulted various carnival advertisements by influential carnival groups to expose the dominant messages of class, gender, and race that often taken for granted, yet reveal blatant inequalities that still abound on the island.

I argue that while Trinidad Carnival is perceived to be a festival that welcomes people of all ages, races, classes and genders, its popularity and subsequent commodification has made it fall victim to business-minded people who have completely changed the concept of carnival. Rather than being a period for breaking boundaries, and challenging social hierarchies, the corporatization of carnival continues to build invisible walls, separating members of society on the basis of class and economic standing, and race and skin tone, while sexualizing and objectifying young women.
With the business owners’ focus on profits, carnival has turned into an elaborate commercial industry. At the same time, while there still exists a grassroots version of carnival, committed to the more traditional elements that value community spirit and the mocking and challenging of social norms and inequalities, this new popular contemporary carnival that is largely influenced by middle-class entrepreneurs, has become normalized. It is the carnival that is most advertised, and most sought after. Hence, many of the carnival events are becoming more expensive each year. As businesses compete with one another, they try to make their events more exclusive, so as to appear more valuable, and worth attending. The same can be said about the costume parade. Fewer people now make their own costumes, or opt to join simpler, more traditional carnival bands. Instead, people register with popular carnival bands for the masquerade. This also comes at a hefty price.

The privatization of carnival divides people along economic and class lines. In our imaginations, everyone comes together for carnival, but realistically, carnival brings certain groups of people together based on their economic position and their class. This is increasingly seen as influential event companies have gotten into the habit of gatekeeping their events. As discussed, they use committee members to distribute tickets, limiting access to people who do not belong to a specific social group. Especially since certain images of carnival are emphasized in the media, particularly those images that present carnival as a luxurious, leisure experience, people who cannot afford those types of events are marginalized from the carnival experience. The more affordable events are often seen as second-class and are not regarded the same way as the costly events. Furthermore, the carnival has become less about creativity and cultural expression and
more about parties and gaining access to certain parties. Therefore, if you cannot afford to go to these parties, what these practices tell you is that you are inadequate. Ironically, the carnival marginalizes the underprivileged, the group that was perhaps the most influential in the history of carnival.

The representation of women in carnival media is also notable. I see the practice of using women to promote carnival as directly linked to its commodification. The problem here is that the women’s bodies are often sexualized in these advertisements. Moreover, my analysis of the carnival texts in this thesis shows that the models fit a very specific look, and this fantasy look is presented as the norm, as the quintessential Trinidadian woman. This woman, or the carnival body that these businesses use as the representative of carnival is laden with cultural values and perceptions of beauty that are biased.

The carnival body, or the quintessential female, based on many carnival advertisements is a brown or light-skinned woman with long hair. She exudes sexuality and sexual availability. She is confident, but she is extremely eroticized in the media. Women continue to be objectified, and continue to be told how they should look, by the constant representation of this prescribed look. Darker-skinned women, bigger women, and older women are being told that they are not good enough. Carnival should be a time when women disregard the demands made by men to look and act a certain way. Instead, it is just another time, like any other, to try to keep up with unrealistic heteronormative gender expectations.

I do not anticipate a complete overhaul of the carnival, as we know it. Despite the negative changes capitalism has brought to the festival, some good can be found. It has
created job opportunities, outstanding events, and continues to attract people from all over the world. I do wish to see, however, some changes regarding what we advertise when we advertise Trinidad Carnival, more specifically, what and whom we promote as Trinidadian. I believe that change can possibly come about if advertisers, especially the more influential carnival businesses that advertise, use their power to promote the diverse group of Trinbagonians who enjoy the carnival. Rather than continuously celebrating the “ascriptive mulatta,” they could use carnival advertising to celebrate Blackness, and to show the Black woman with her natural hair as confident and sexy, in addition to other races. Event organizers could also distribute tickets and costumes more fairly. I understand that event planners want to ensure the safety of their patrons, so a certain level of gatekeeping is necessary, but the average citizen should not feel like they are participating in an obstacle course to pay for a ticket or a costume. They could make their approach less cliquish by selling tickets and opening registration with fewer restrictions.

In the future I hope to see a more diverse group of male and female models for carnival promotions. We are already burdened with the stick-figure models of the dominant world fashion industry, carnival should not be another space in which that practice is allowed is flourish. Young women and men should not feel compelled to look a certain way, especially to look a way that is obviously biased. Women should be able to express the sexuality and be sexy without being exploited. We do not need to have a woman’s breasts invite us to carnival. These practices only assist in maintaining patriarchy, objectifying women, and upholding prescribed sexual expectations. By representing women as sex objects in carnival advertising, advertisers are essentially inviting visitors (and locals) to expect sexual favors for Trinidadian women.
There is always room for research and improvement. Since this thesis focuses primarily on popular contemporary carnival, future research could include a closer look at traditional carnival in Trinidad and the plans for sustaining tradition in today’s busy world. It would have been helpful for this particular study, to get the opinion of others on the state of carnival today. I have not come across much work on carnival that actually includes what the public thinks about the current changes, including the unreasonable prices for many of the events, how difficult it is to access several of these events, and the overt sexualisation of women. We need to be aware of how our actions affect people around us, and as long as carnival is around, there will always be something to improve.
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