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Brief autobiographical note

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ABSTRACT

There is some debate as to whether the diasporic carnivals have lost their revolutionary potential, and whether they have been co-opted and incorporated into the capitalist production system, (Nurse, 2014) as many have moved toward illustrating other kinds of liberatory practices needed to survive within the global carnival canon. When carnival's elements, its general structure, curated elements, and the overall design experience are considered, much of what exists in carnivals in the region, also exists in carnivals across the world. Perhaps, the main distinction is how culturally intelligible materials are manipulated and integrated into the festivities. The carnivalizing of carnivals and the position that they serve a specific set of functions further polarizes the role these festivals can perform in advancing their host territories' core social, cultural, political, and economic ambitions. This is particularly true for smaller Caribbean nations dependent upon carnivals to boost their tourism. Using the Tobago Carnival model as a case study, the research aims to assess the authentication process for a new carnival, using intangible cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge in the development of a new, authentic carnival experience. By employing qualitative methods, it aims to unravel the complexities of tradition, policy, and contemporary demands shaping this cultural phenomenon.

Keywords- Carnival, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Policy, Story

Introduction

Mud drenched bodies spread across the streets of Scarborough. Very few mud masquerade players are identifiable, while others have made a deliberate attempt to be seen. The band journeys across the state-determined Carnival route and make their way to the a main stop - the climax point. Masquerade performance in mud might be viewed in a typical masking tradition to the average Carnival participant, but to some Tobagonians, mud separates the island from the world. Caribbean carnivals are multi-dimensional, multi-voice, multi-layered technologies that continue to articulate the region's complex history as well as its ambitions. However, Carnivals in the region are often reduced to two readings. On the one hand, "to the stranger, the carnival is a breath-taking experience, not least because of the polygenetic character of the participants" (Hill, 1972). In this reading, the diverse, often unexplainable plurality of social codes and political performances take centre. Nationhood and national pride are enacted

as indicators of duty to one's small island state or to the performance of the many roles that exist (one of which must be occupied) in the temporary carnival continuum. This reading is often concerned with "the transformative effects of Carnival that are felt not only during the Carnival itself – in that extraordinary moment on the road – but during the rituals of preparation, performance and play that take place throughout the year". (Marshall, 2019)

On the other hand, to those strategically concerned with the carnival's existence, it is a "cultural resource to be exploited as you would any other marketable resource – is part of the postmodern phenomenon of intellectual property, which assigns an economic value to the creation, ownership, and buying and selling of information". (Schechner, 2004) In the latter reading, the Carnival's ability to navigate the lines between merriment and monetary value is explored. Herein, Carnivals are asked to do more questioning, than it can supposedly provide answers. Who and what are at work? What does this labour resemble? How does this work service the Carnival's varied agendas? Who determines the Carnival's value? Is this value experiential? What should this experience look and feel like? Given the symbolic value of both readings, the research seeks to understand the implications of both readings and how these potential internal conflicts impact a new Carnival's production.

Carnivals are the "resource for cultural resistance and for social progress". (Marshall et al., 2016)

The 21st century Carnival has transcended the practice of imitation and historical or political opposition. Carnival in the Caribbean has been the source from which colonized nations have forged unique identities, in the wake of the pressure that facilitates and accompanies the increasing complexities of globalization. They represent the cradle of the region's creativity, drawn from the ethos of national and communal narratives told within and outside each nation state. The region's ability to move its own stories drawn from the constructions of "margins of the nation-space" (Bhabha, 1990) towards in-between spaces, where meanings of political, social and cultural authority can be negotiated, has been one of its most valuable resources. Carnival continues to play a tremendous role in facilitating the process of symbolic national and local storying and re-storying. Critically, it organizes "space and stage for the practice of creative imagining," (Williams, 2024) it grants the "freedom and flexibility to explore things which might be difficult to language and show in everyday life," (Roachford, 2024) and it "fuels the confidence to question perceived normalness and the impact this has on people living in a society." (James, 2024) "Because it is centred in imagination"... "carnival, thus, affirms not only the restorative value of festivity but also a concept of cultural and individual history, seen not as the story of public institutions, centralized governments, systems of law and order, governing economies, or even the conquering or the subjugating of peoples, but as the encoding and imprinting of genetic, cultural, and artistic legacies, of cultural memory embodied in dance, music, and fantasy". (Schechner, 2004)

"Each country celebrates its festivities, enlivening and cultivating their traditions of from thousands of years while highlighting the cultural

values that built the identities of their people.” (Vega, 2022) Among the oldest Caribbean carnivals, the Trinidad Carnival has provided numerous clues for the development, design, execution, practice, and viability of carnivals in the region. With its extensive history, which will not be covered in this research paper, Trinidad Carnival remains a formidable reference for the intersections of nationhood, historical retention, cultural viability, and the festival tourism agenda. Notably, the Trinidad Carnival has influenced the Carnival in Tobago, with which it shares nation status. In 2022, the Tobago House of Assembly announced the venture into a new carnival for the island of Tobago that was separate from, and not be confused with the national carnival celebrations. The aim, according to the Tourism secretary was to, “create opportunities for socio-economic activities on the island, by introducing a carnival that had the potential to generate revenue, show off Tobago’s unique identity, and boost the island’s Tourism product”. (Burris, 2022) All this she noted, could be done through leveraging Tobago’s unique cultural ways and driving the island's cultural and environmental products, its people, and heritage as its unique value proposition.

Although efforts have been made to direct strategic focus toward the use of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) material, the two-year response to participation, performance, and support of the areas of traditional mas have seen little research focus to determine its contributing value. This research focus is primarily on traditional and mud masquerade forms. It is a unique study that aims to harmonize proposed ICH utilization strategies with actual occurrences. Given the novelty of the Tobago carnival, there are no other studies on the role of ICH in its development and the study will conclude by offering suggestions for approaches that can be explored. In the sections that follow, I present the literature review and research hypotheses. I detail the existing understanding of ICH and its role in authenticating a new carnival experience. The methodology follows and I present the research findings. In our discussion section, I outline the theoretical and socio-cultural implications of the research findings. Lastly, I describe the study’s limitations and opportunities for further research.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The (Trinidad and Tobago) carnival sector refers to a set of activities that have evolved to produce significant economic value, in the form of national output, employment, and trade. At the core of the carnival sector lies six (6) main and well-known industry groups: (i) Steelband; (ii) carnival music; (iii) mas; (iv) fete; (v) associated business associations; and (vi) dedicated public administration services...”. (James 2014) Of these six core groups, three sectors are ICH-based, which have at their foundation, cultural expressions that are indigenous to the nation. Intangible Cultural Heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. (UNESCO 2015) ICH’s place in the carnival is typically read from their role within the industry groups listed above. For this study, embodied mas

performance will serve as the domain of exploration. Three key concepts are explored to underpin this research analysis: Carnival narratives and dialectics, policies in Carnival and ICH, and ICH and cultural creativity.

Carnival narratives and dialectics

Carnival exists as a centrepiece in a vast diasporic network that circulates mas, concepts, persons, and all kinds of specific carnival practices. (Schechner, 2004) Its primary source of energy - and this has a lot to do with its flexibility - is located neither in inversion nor in affirmation but in the tension between subverting and affirming, nor put in another way, in its dialectic ...". (Riggio, 2004) It is therefore, a space of plural performance, forged by the kinds of social freedoms that are not only historical, social or political but which draws for the everyday experiences of the bodies which occupy its festivities; each of which is often simultaneously historical, social, cultural or political. "As a site for everyday conviviality, pleasure, social cohesion, and resistance ...". (Marshall, 2019) carnival narrates a complex, evolving set of social codes that has achieved "a synthesis between old and new, between folk forms and art forms, between native and alien traditions." (Hill, 1972) This 'in-betweenity', as Tony Hall notes, has allowed traditions that were born out of carnival celebrations, to transform and to sustain themselves. The symbolic exchange of traditional and contemporary circulations has also allowed carnivals to become a space of social practice; one whose arrangements are both predetermined and constructed in real time. The lack of a single definition to determine a carnival dialectic offers the idea that perhaps a singular definition cannot adequately describe the phenomenon or the intersections of truth from which narratives are developed.

Riggio notes that because carnivals are centred on imagination and intuition rather than on logic or reason, (they) privilege things of the spirit over the material or phenomenological. (2019) The "joyful, transcendent experiences", (Minshall 2019) coupled with the "moments of collective encounters" (Vega 2022) argue in favour of the intangibility of some aspects of the carnival's experience. When juxtaposed against the social affordances that are enacted in ritual, repetition, and performance, the 'things of the spirit' to which Milla Cozart Riggio refers, can also be likened to the ways personal experiences and personal reminiscences ultimately contribute to the process of storying, from an individual viewpoint. At an elemental level, we need stories, to organize and transmit our experiences to others and to help form meaningful connections (Dyson, Genishi 1994). Riggio also posits that the ethos of imagination and intuition is consistent with attitudes toward time, space, and the creation of community within the carnival. (2019) She notes, "The emphasis on imaginative fantasy and intuitive knowing reinforces carnival's historical identification with the organic, seasonal rhythms of the pre-industrial world, even in a modern urban setting". (Riggio 2019) Overlooked, is the fact that the production of knowledge, particularly regarding how bodies inject, absorb, perform, and navigate itself within the carnival, is as dynamic an area of exploration and study as the carnival dialectic itself. Fundamentally, and because of its

contradictory nature, a singular dialectic may be inclined to privilege one set of knowledge, and other the other.

Policies in Carnival and ICH

Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is promoted as the ‘mecca’ or ‘mother’ of all the carnivals in the Caribbean diaspora, in a home and host country dichotomy, with the home (Trinidad) carnival positioned as the source of creativity and inspiration for those in the host countries...” (Burke 2015) Even though carnival has evolved into a major industrial system, currently policy design is largely conceived as cultural policy and largely ad hoc. (James 2014) The national cultural policy of Trinidad and Tobago to which Vanus James refers, opens with an acknowledgment that it is of “paramount urgency that the policy address the issue of strengthening our national identity and cultural confidence sensitively and substantially...” as well as “that of historical cultural affirmation while satisfying the desire of younger generations to leverage the cultural sector as a mechanism for creative expression, economic prosperity and the sustainable livelihoods of cultural practitioners”. (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2020) While these ideas have been espoused over some time as the simultaneous roles of the local carnival sector, the policy does not make clear distinctions regarding the nation’s plan to ensure that these expressed roles materialize, as well as sustainable sectorial support for areas that are largely and inversely supported by and dependent upon the carnival phenomena, namely traditional mas. The national policy notes a commitment to the sustainability of the “preservation and protection of cultural and natural heritage and traditional knowledge, creation of opportunities for sustainable livelihoods in the creative economy including exploration and development of new markets for cultural goods and services” (2020) However, what exist is the existence of ICH traditions and practices that only come to bear in state competitions, and in the absence of sustained strategic preservation and educational approaches.

There is a general belief that the potential of the festival is muted by an under- developed policy environment that has resulted in the dominance of private sector imperatives such as the crass profiteering that have marginalised certain social groups from participating more fully in the festival. (Burke 2017) Where traditional aspects of Carnival are concern, there is an even greater sense of political patronizing, much to the disservice of the traditions, and the knowledge bearers who invest in this area of carnival. Traditional mas attracts a smaller margin of national attention, and it has too become muted in the politics of preservation through competition. Burke notes that while “the NCC has sought to preserve traditional masquerade by training people all over the country in the carnival arts”... “the resources dedicated to this area is paltry in comparison to the expenditure on other income generating activities”. (Burke 2008) Today, mas within this domain is dependent upon state resource distribution. For this reason, most of the carnivals (and related traditions) find themselves in a position of resource dependency upon state. The contributions are then generally viewed as subsidies rather

than investments in the public art process of festival tourism. (Nurse 2004) While on the one hand, some might argue that subsidies have kept traditional mas active, on the other hand, its gaze within the festival tourism construct requires deeper attention. If carnival is to be partially viewed as “an opportunity to renew traditions and build community pride”, (Burke 2017) then new strategies are required to ensure that traditional mas “remain relevant to its society”. (UNESCO 2019)

ICH and Cultural creativity

Culture is a society’s total way or pattern of life - the distinctive ways of a society as perceivable at a given point in time: ways of thinking, feeling and behaving... (Thompson 1991) It is a system or organism that embraces all aspects of the life of any given society. (Ebewo and Sirayi 2010) The ideas of culture as a ‘total way or pattern’ and as ‘organism’ demands an exploration of the symbiotic relationship between culture’s livingness and its ability to encompass a wide range of embodied, social actions and experiences. UNESCO defines Intangible cultural heritage as material that is transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (2020) ICH borrows from the idea that culture is living and transmittable. Its propensity to be ‘constantly recreated by communities’ requires focus. Cultural creativity, a burgeoning field of exploration that is separate from innovation, can be loosely defined as the practice of creating and imagining narratives and processes within and with specific historical and social contexts in mind. (Zalenga 2018) Cultural creativity therefore allows for the integration of imagination in the cultural occurrence process, by on the one hand, centring creativity as “an essential human capacity for new ideas, solutions, and improvements and internal to all modern spheres of life”, (Vickery 2018) while on the other hand, acknowledging that culture’s mobility is for its own survival. (Bully 2005)

Carnival has always been an imaginative space. The existence of folk-carnival traditions that have been storied and performed to articulate the feelings and conditions of a period is a manifestation of this idea. Susan Craig-James notes that the development of the carnival arts in Tobago, can largely be credited to both the outward and then inward movement into Tobago as well as the incorporation, integration and adoption of some traditions into Tobago’s extant cultural material. (1977) Aside from Tobago, Nurse asserts that the development of the art forms and celebratory traditions of the diaspora carnival have been borrowed, appropriated and integrated into other Carnival (European). (2004) This movement and residency of cultural ideas operate as a tenant of cultural creativity, which has as its foundation, the kind of fluidity that is necessary to survive in imaginative spaces. This very tense, energetic, and creative interculturality (Schechner 2004), makes room for the exchange of relational knowledge and relational actions (Ullrich et.al 2022) than makes the experience of storying, an memory-constructing, imaginative one. Because stories “provide a framework through which we can investigate experience” (Rooney et.al 2016) cultural creativity might demand greater focus to understand how

traditions are not only transposed, but how they live under new, imagined and actual circumstances.

Methodology

The methodology draws from the insights gathered in the review of the literature, and therefore engages a mixed-methodological, qualitative research approach. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with practitioners and stakeholders who have worked and participated in and around traditional mas in the previous two iterations of Tobago October Carnival. The general target sample were the small pool of 14 stakeholders who have long engaged in the practice of mas in Tobago, as well as whose practice extended into carnival. Storytelling and narrative analysis were used to investigate the ways people interact with ICH in the carnival space. It should be noted that the miniscule existence of secondary data created challenges for tracing the development of the area in focus. However, I engaged a research report from the 2023 October carnival for data emerging from that year. Specifically, the investigation involved the activities hereunder, each of which were framed in the following ways:

1. **Focus groups and interviews:** Michael Pickering notes that when it comes to focus groups and interviews, “a relatively unstructured approach has the advantage of giving respondents space to explore issues they consider important..” (2008) A series of questions were generated and delivered in an way that allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their mas experience, their thoughts on the personal and collective meanings of ma (Marshall, et al., 2017)s and the value of the specific mud mas in Tobago. In instances where some participants showed the willingness to share more information, one-on-one interviews were scheduled following the focus groups. A total of four interviews were conducted coming out of the 2, 2 hour long focus groups. The participants were invited to share any digital static or performance material that they captured during or related to their experience. This material was read for their narratological and storied inferences, values and meanings.
2. **Narrative analysis:** To understand how mas practices are embedded into conceptions of nation and authenticity, the stories and other material (pictures, videos, ritual processes), which are lodged within the world of the tellers and performers, are examined for their narrative meanings. In focus also, are the overlapping and relational constructs, meanings, ideologies and beliefs existing among the stories shared by the participants. Relational connections shape identity. (Ullrich et.al, 2022) To investigate the mas as performance practice , closer attention was paid to the connecting, embodied expressions shared by performers who reflected on their mas process through video and static content. Specific focus was given to the relationship between the expression, the state of performance and the corporeal sensibilities involved. The aim was to apply the stages of story analysis as a framework for understanding these intersections and how they relate.
3. **Masquerader as autoethnographer:** Relational knowledge exchange helps to connect knowledge learned through storytelling processes with relational actions that lead to healing, transformation, respected sovereignty, and liberation. (Ulrich et.al 2022) Intrinsic to my understanding how indigenous experiences facilitated the process of

cultural authentication, I played mas. My observations and field data formatted as pictures, voice recordings and video recording enabled close reflection on mas as a means of reimagining identity and establishing space within space. My role as ethnographer was also aimed at examining how my and others' stories are created, recreated and deconstructed to give meaning to unconventional ways of making meaning.

The diagrams below documents the (i) interview profiles for all participants, and (ii) the areas priority investigation. Later, Figure 1 shows (iii) overlapping concepts, thoughts, feelings and ideas related to the four thematic areas. The sample strategy engaged a mixed approach that support the research's flexibility, triangulation objectives as well as met its examination needs. Both intensity sampling and typical case sampling were used. Friday Nymbili and Leah Nymbili expounds that on the one hand, typical case sampling involves taking a sample of what one would call typical, normal or average for a particular phenomenon. (2024) This they note, is drawn from Michael Quinn Patton's research on purposive sampling. (1990) Typical case sampling, therefore, focuses on the average population within a case, context, event, or place. (Nymbili F. and Nymbili L. 2024) On the other hand intensity sampling provided "information rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely...", while providing information that is "rather mixed and relevant to the topic at hand and does not limit participation to few individuals". (Nymbili F. and Nymbili L. 2024)

TABLE 1 - PARTICIPANT'S PROFILE

Area of specialization	Age	Specific Focus
Practitioner	46	Mud masquerade
Arts Administrator/ Performer	62	Traditional mas performance
Practitioner	47	Mud masquerade
Organizer/ Performer	37	Traditional mas performance
Organizer/ Performer	39	Traditional mas enactment
Practitioner	43	Mud masquerade
Practitioner	45	Mud masquerade
Practitioner	26	Traditional mas performance
Performer	23	Mud masquerade
Performer	29	Traditional mas performance
Arts Administrator/ Performer	40	Traditional mas enactment
Arts technocrat/policy developer	33	Mud masquerade
Arts technocrat	47	Traditional mas enactment
Arts Administrator/ Performer	40	Mud masquerade
Practitioner	36	Mud masquerade

TABLE 2 - PRIORITY AREAS OF INVESTIGATION

Theme number	Theme
1	Meanings of traditional and cultural forms

2	ICH as a tactic for local authentication in Carnival
3	Contemporary demands meets local obligation for presenting traditional forms
4	Performing cultural tourism versus performing cultural self

In table 2, the first area of focus explored the research participant's personalized and general understandings of ICH, traditional mas and the use of cultural forms. The theme aimed to engender a wide understanding of the ways the participants viewed those key areas, since their exploration in the carnival space is central to the research. Theme 2 concentrated on ICH as a socially and culturally manipulable tool for advancing the agenda of a distinct, small island carnival. The theme was drawn from the policy directive given by the carnival policy drivers on the island, as a way to distinguish Tobago from other island carnivals. The third theme examined perceptions and evidence of the gaps between the contemporary demands and the local obligations for presenting traditional and indigenous forms. Lastly, theme four investigated the idea of performing Tourism versus performing accepted indigenous traditions.

Analysis of the data

The data gathered from the interview transcripts were analysed. Following the UNESCO Framework for cultural statistics (2009), which explains the processes involved in measuring home-based and identity building practices, the analysis examined the four thematic areas as well as investigated their correlation to each other. The table hereunder shows the recurrent and overlapping ideas, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions emerging from the data. The table also shows areas of contradicting ideas.

TABLE 1 - SYMBOLIC OVERLAPPING OF IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES

Thematic area	Participant's perspectives	Direct quotes
1 - Meanings of traditional and cultural forms	Provides a deep sense of freedom of expressions. Because people 'do'	"Is not just the carnival freedom eh. Is also the feeling. I is part ah something that is mine. Nobody could take that feeling".

	<p>it, it lives within us.</p> <p>The practice of mud playing is indigenous to Tobago</p> <p>ICH traditions show us who we are and who we will become</p> <p>The island's creativity can be found in how the people have made reimagined their performance practices in carnival and otherwise</p> <p>The traditions may not be distinct, but the 'way' it is done is of note</p>	
<p>2 - ICH as a tactic for local authentication in Carnival</p>	<p>ICH and traditional forms can distinctly tell Tobago apart from other nations, including Trinidad</p> <p>ICH should be centred as the main 'face' of the local carnival</p>	<p>“ The mud mas doh exist nowhere, in the same way exist here (Tobago). To sell weself, we have to sell other people don't have and we have to do it very w</p>

	<p>More curated experiences can teach people about why the traditions are valuable</p> <p>The idea of waiting to perform or speak the traditions is not enough if it is to be used strategically</p>	
<p>3 - Contemporary demands meets local obligation for presenting traditional forms</p>	<p>Traditional mas can withstand the global demands (unspoken) for carnival to be homogenized if we are sure about how we wish to utilize it</p> <p>If Tobago wants to attract tourist using carnival, it will eventually have to provide exactly what other carnivals offer. This can potentially mean that traditional mas will become obsolete</p>	<p>“If we so big on masking and the world is invested these masking traditions, our selling point should be in on our thing, and let the world catch up. Is either thing good, or it eh good. Simple”.</p>

	<p>The current usage of the traditional mas does not allow it to compete at the level of other mas performance practices</p>	
<p>4 - Performing cultural tourism versus performing cultural self</p>	<p>Carnival's main purpose is to attract domestic and global attention. This therefore requires us to meet our tourist half way</p> <p>The island's size does not allow its people to fully drive the things, like ICH, that it regards as 'indicators' of selfhood.</p> <p>There is no small destination tourism without delinking from some traditions; even those that are deploy inherent to the island's identity.</p>	<p>"Bikini and beads are the mark of carnival tourism amount of traditional dance or mud mas will change that".</p>

Findings

The focus of this paper is to understand the ways centring intangible cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, can be clear indicators of distinction in the development of new, authentic carnival experiences. The finding demonstrates the perceptions of this idea, as well as the evidence of its existence in the Tobago Carnival. The data analysed hereunder are contributions from the focus groups, interviews and my autoethnographic reflections as a masquerader. I have separated my reflections from the groups', to maintain objective boundaries between what was gathered and what I have experienced. Granted this research is one part of a larger, continuous study on the development of the Tobago Carnival, the analysis focuses on the thematic questioning, coupled with the performance and narrative analysis from both static and video content submitted by the participants.

Tobago had distinctive culture and unique traditions. (Craig-James, 2008) Its core, distinguishing feature being perhaps, the livingness of these traditions and the role they have and continue to play in the lives of Tobagonians. Carnival traditions are not necessarily diametrically opposed to the every traditions, given that performance and other masquerade traditions on the island, are born out of the dailiness of people. This, Damion Holder noted, "was the reason I (he) am so drawn to mud mas. I am not masking or hiding from nothing. I am myself, covered in mud and standing in the wide open road for the whole world to see". (2024) The feelings towards ICH, mud mas and other traditional forms within Carnival, were generally unanimous expressions of pride, and an acknowledgement and clear articulation of Tobago's unique cultural material. Similarly, more than half of the respondents acknowledged that mud masking traditions belonged to the island and that the existence of such (mud mas) did not exist anywhere else in the world. For this reason, feelings that these unique offerings needed to be safeguarded were also collective. The cultural creativity that many of these traditions have been met with, also argue for a sort of "periphery-to-centre cultural flow" (Nurse 2004) that participants shared were not informed by state policing. We wanted to see mas in a different light, so we created space for that light to be nurtured and for it to be transferred to the streets. (Denoon, 2024) Although shared with the region, the acknowledgement and belief that Tobago's treatment of mas and other forms of ICH are what ideally memorializes the traditions, make a strong case for the role mas can play in the authenticating of an new island carnival. The reimagining and insistence on the mas' place in the carnival, even if a miniscule way demands even further stakeholder dialogue. This, I have observed, is an area that requires separate focus, but on which I will expound briefly below.

The idea of ICH as a tactic for the local authentication of Tobago's carnival did not appear far-fetched to the participants. Insofar, many expressed their feelings that the overall strategy should have been built more directly on how the island's traditions can hold centre stage. While it was consensus that the distinct traditions could potentially establish lines of cultural separation between Tobago and other territories, participants also noted that opportunities for targeted approaches were either minimal, or non-existent. There were also expressions of confusion regarding whether policy drivers understood

how to engage ICH and traditional forms beyond their stage functions. Many of the participants were not opposed to cultural creativity which would allow traditions to take new shapes, thereby engaging new meanings. If we eh start to watch the thing (traditions) wid ah different eye (changed perspective), we guh never see it again (become obsolete). And in de carnival business, we have to move fass”. (Kirk, 2024) Although change advocacy was met with acceptance, there were a few who resisted the idea that change was necessary. Mathias Zarlenga notes that a new narrative on cultural creativity is necessary in order to prevent a narrow understanding of the social processes behind cultural creation being solely part of innovation and economic purposes. (2016) One such area is education. There are so many untapped experiences that we can create for people to truly understand what we are about as an island. (Thomas, 2024) The perspective that a shift to more educationally-driven, curated experiences can benefit both locals and guests, was agreed to as an approach to addressing the need for more meaningful ICH use strategy.

Keith Nurse notes that “the diasporic Caribbean carnivals are at a historical turning point. In the last decade they have grown in size and popularity beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. The diaspora Caribbean carnivals have grown from being the bane of their respective cities to becoming an indispensable feature for popular culture, multiculturalism and cultural tourism. (2004) While the evidence of exponential growth for carnivals in the region has invited noteworthy interest, the simultaneous concern that participants have registered was whether small nation states could withstand the demands of the global carnival movement. I introduced for contemplation the idea of carnival modelling as a way to study and pattern aspects of carnival that are applicable to one’s nation state, without copy and pasting an entire framework. Certainly, most (Caribbean) carnival models exist in experiential fashions, and via not documented frameworks. It was noted that “the less focus is given to ICH, the less chance it has at surviving globalised carnivals” (Thomas, 2024) Simultaneously, the wide acceptance of the bikini and beads phenomena, also suggests that the future of the island’s carnival has already largely been tied to what the world has come to associate carnivals with. Mud masquerades as indigenous forms are a segment of the overall carnival. It does not define the carnival experience. If all ICH and traditional forms are looked at from this viewpoint, I think the problem clarifies itself. (Clarke, 2023) Notable, the current utility of traditional forms does not fully allow it to be a leading part of the carnival development discourse. These is no evidence that suggests otherwise.

For intangible cultural heritage to be kept alive, it must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practised and learned within communities and between generations. (UNESCO, 2019) This intergenerational learning which is bound within locals communities, face the growing concern of “not fully finding space in the world of carnivals, as carnival feel like a mirror for the visitors”. (James 2024) Further, select traditions, those which fit the standard aesthetical descriptions and which appear to be what carnivals ask for, are mostly reflected in the festivities. (Williams, 2014) This means that other traditions of seeming lesser appeal do not make their way into the festival. Aside from mud mas, this has been the case for most masquerade traditions.

The cultural tourism agenda has further complicated Caribbean nation-branding and cultural selfhood. The outward facing agenda in guilty of privileging which traditions reflect us in the ‘best ways’ and which do not. Nurse notes that “successful festivals build the society’s cultural confidence and image of self-worth and identity. In this way it creates a synergistic relationship between the tourism industry and community development”. (Nurse, 2001) Simultaneously, the participants noted that the island’s size does not allow its people to fully drive the things, like ICH, that it regards as ‘indicators’ of selfhood. The confidence of which Nurse speaks, is therefore always in seeming contestation. “Plenty things we do is to appeal to the tourist taste. I doh mind sharing we wid the world but not if it compromise we”. (Kirk, 2024) The performance of self-hood is too part of the cultural tourism agenda. The pride that is conjured from my experience, is both a performance of self and one of cultural tourism that is bound up in the wide cultural tourism agenda. Tourism is built on dual interests and oftentimes, one suffers at the expense of the other. The absence of a cultural tourism policy argues in favour of several sustained challenges, one of which is the performed relationship with ICH and the Tobagonian identity within the carnival space.

Conclusion

In the hit soca duet, Adana Roberts and Zan expresses with visceral clarity,

“De carnival sweet like Tobago,
de condensed milk in the cocoa,
the gyal dem hot flambeau and bad like Rambo,
right now dey wining down low”. - 2022

The Tobago carnival continue to show great promise. Practitioners and arts managers working around the new carnival product continue to innovate on ICH and other traditional forms, as a way of ensuring its safeguarding in carnival. Some notable innovations are the beautification of the mud phenomenon to attract younger patrons who are dazzled by the bikini and beads paradigm. As such, the mud have seen symbolic colouring over the years, giving birth to a new kind of festival-in-colour experience. The question of whether the innovations will be social, cultural and economic returns remain. Simultaneously, without policy, much of these efforts will be met with more innovation from contemporary carnival thereby making these advancements non-competitive. There is a general need for policy infrastructure which honours both the freeform ethos of carnival and which curates space for creative imagining in the use of ICH and other forms. Without clear strategies, new carnivals face the challenge of appearing to reflect all other carnivals in the world. The tagline ritual, revelry, release while fresh in its approach, do not capture the authentic differences or approaches to maintaining the differences that the island wants with its carnival. Greater stakeholder dialogue is required and an intentional approach to creatively designing new strategies can mark the currently expanding carnival, as a formidable one.

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