

# **FROM STREETS TO BEATS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SPACE, PLACE, AND COMMUNITY IN THE FORMATION OF SOCA AND AXÉ MUSIC COMPOSERS**

Sean Samad

Ph.D. Candidate at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Sean Samad is from Trinidad and Tobago and a Caribbean Brazilianist. He teaches Brazilian / Lusophone Studies and Intercultural Communication. His research interests are centred on the impact/role of music, festivals, and cultures of the African diaspora, wake work and the movements towards greater liberation and expression.

## **ABSTRACT**

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Soca and axé are two renowned musical genres that animate Caribbean and Latin American carnivals. Composers of these genres have typically experienced low visibility despite their significant role in the creative and cultural production processes. Caribbean and Latin American carnivals emanate from contexts existing in the afterlives of slavery, which frames cultural production. The study examines departs from a larger study on the role of environmental, social and cultural conditions that fashion the frameworks of creativity for these composers. It focuses specifically on the role place and spatial contexts play and the impact they have on the way composers of these genres develop and create.

Keywords: composition, carnival, spatiality, soca, axé

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## **Introduction**

“Why you doing it if it ain’t helping nobody” – Hafizah Augustus Geter recounts how her grandmother Gussie Mae, a former domestic worker and sharecropper in Georgia, posed this question to her then 19 year old son studying and making art (Geter, 2023). This question echoes across all cultural and artistic sectors as we churn through the 21<sup>st</sup> century but is even more pressing for creatives of African descent working and creating in the diaspora amidst an upsurge of consciousness. The question has implications for how we continue to perceive cultural and artistic production (especially in the global South) and how we then approach planning, practices and paradigms around cultural/arts management.

In this global environment, (modified by the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions) research on arts and culture management continues to be lopsided in favour of developed countries and certain sectors of the creative industries. Critiques of research generated and foci in this area assert that many emerging perspectives continue to see culture as utilitarian, may be reductionist, are reactive (Devereaux, 2009) instead of exploring the ways practices and policies for the promotion of cultural production could be proactive. The intent of this paper is to dig deeper into the spatial conditions that impact carnival music composers.

Set against this context are the existence of annual, calendar-stopping, multi-layered arts and cultural festivals in the Caribbean and Latin America, labelled carnival/carnaval. These festivals exist across the region and in the majority, emerged in various sites and spaces as culturally-hybrid, post-enslavement celebrations of freedom. Of these many festivals, some have blossomed into festivals that animate cities (and in some cases nations) into a whirlwind of activities that command the attention, admiration and anticipation of global audiences. The carnivals of Trinidad (the large island in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago) in the Caribbean and Brazil in Latin America (in the key cities of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife) stand out as hallmark American carnivals. Carnivals in these two countries animate and mobilise multiple sectors and have grown in economic significance and importance to the sites in which they occur. The Trinidad carnival has also inspired diasporic satellite carnivals across the globe.

One of the fundamental sectors/industries without which these carnivals cannot exist is music. The music created annually as the context-relevant soundtrack energizes the people and all activities/events of the carnivals. Though similar to music production sectors across the world, this sector is framed differently by time-bound demand, practitioners existing in the wake and afterlives of American slavery and creating contrary to working in environments that operate based on logics of antiblackness, structural silences and inequalities (Sharpe, 2016). In the limited studies done on these music sectors, attention is usually paid to performers, who are most visible and credited for interpreting and communicating the energy and 'vibe' of the music and carnival. The result is continued low visibility of the practitioners primarily engaged in cultural/artistic production – the composition of the music, a form of Sharpe's "wake work"<sup>1</sup>(2016). Ultimately, studying the creative processes and the creatives behind carnival music is key to insights on the purpose and functioning of these festivals as manifestations of freedom which affirm that "the praxis of black life is articulated through music, music making, music listening, orchestration, beats, bass, notations, lyrics, rhymes, soul, groove" (McKittrick, 2016, p. 89).

This paper aims to direct focus on the sociocultural conditions that frame the creative process of two key genres of music that are utilised in two of the largest carnivals in the African diaspora of the Americas – soca (native to Trinidad and Tobago but created across the English-speaking Caribbean) and axé (native to the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia and popularised in the carnival of its capital city, Salvador). The paper will explore the notions of space, place and community, how they impact composers of these two genres and therefore key creative processes central to cultural production. In previous work on creativity, the spatiality of creativity and the role of places and spatial contexts have been overlooked and disregarded (Meusburger, 2009). For the purpose of this paper, the definition of composition utilised will be "the real-time creative act of making a musical product" (Collins, 2012). It must be noted that the definitions around the parameters of composition and musical creativity continue to be contested without any global theories or models.

## **Conceptual framework**

### ***Artistic production as Wake work***

In her seminal work, Christina Sharpe discusses the lived realities of people of African descent in the diaspora (the wake) – the afterlives of slavery, a past that is not past, whose unresolved and unfolding structures and violences continue to rupture our multiple and overlapping presents (Sharpe, 2016). She reflects on how Black life and suffering has been and must be attended to by a praxis and theory called wake work. Wake work is ultimately confronting the direness of our realities in the African diaspora through praxis and knowledges that awaken consciousness and understanding. Consciousness and understanding operate on the individual and collective level and their awakening are derived from new methods – key ones being the strategic employment of artistic production to observe and mediate our survival (re/seeing) and to respond (re/inhabiting) by doing, thinking and feeling anew. Ultimately wake work is also about the insistence on Black humanity through care for each other and "countering the violence of abstraction" through archival of what we live (Hartman, 2008 cited in Sharpe, 2016, p. 8). This very serious work importantly enables celebration, expression of cultural identity and degrees of freedom (actual/aspirational). Carnival as a festival and all the varied forms of artistic production that contribute to it is a conglomeration of wake work.

The relationship between power and artistic production is evident in these spaces. Structural inequalities built into the social and economic fabric of these postcolonial sites create, "the multiple sights of

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<sup>1</sup> Sharpe posits that "wake work" are sites of artistic production, resistance, consciousness, and possibility for living in the African diaspora.

marginalisation, and therefore institutional in-access that the writer or creative [who is Black and woman] operates from” (Mngxitama, 2022). They include the lack of private space and the luxury of free time to “indulge in our imagination’s capacity and nectar” (Mngxitama, 2022). This is the wake within which upon the end of slavery in the Caribbean and Brazil, carnivals emerged. Despite the marginalisation and holistic challenges presented by the wake, agency continued/s to be employed and creativity used, to harness the available resources and relationships to generate artistic production on varied levels. Of the many conditions of the wake that impact forms of cultural production and creativity, (such as musical composition) spatial conditions<sup>2</sup> will be the focus of this paper.

### ***Creativity/Music composition***

Studies about creativity, the composing process and insights produced have multiplied over the last century, however, many gaps in research prevent a complete understanding of this area of cultural production. Nicolas Donin describes the study of compositional processes as “often deemed a poor relative of the psychology of music” (2012). In the field of musicology, studies have concluded that regardless of the methodology employed the composer’s creative process can be defined as, “a complex creative activity involving various cognitive skills and emotions, embedding technical and (nowadays) technological artefacts, which then produce tangible public outcomes (like a consistent musical text) that go on to become a part of a culture, influencing the subsequent creative cognition of other composers” (Donin, 2012). This definition adequately defines how creativity is in the bedrock of musical composition. Donin comments that the ideal method to study composition is under real world conditions in composers’ normal environments, which allows them to express/describe what they do and the researcher to take into account the resources (cultural and material) available to them (2012). The diverse compositional processes of carnival music in the Americas are ultimately “relational creative acts that unfold as reparative possibilities rooted in black intellectual activities” (McKittrick, 2016). They are by-products of the musical traditions and methods brought to, retained and modified in the Americas by/despite colonial systems and derived frameworks for cultural production.

### ***Carnivals as paradigm***

Carnivals in the Americas are the result of intense interaction between diverse peoples and positionalities. They emerged out of oppressive colonial environments operating based on the ‘paradigm of difference’<sup>3</sup>. This paradigm enacted a colonial cartography of power that attempted to dehumanize and erase some cultures and knowledges while privileging others. We know today that despite this environment and its systems, various cultural traditions, methodologies and technologies endured. The Carnivals of the Americas (especially those focused on in this study – Trinidad and Salvador) are the result of this cultural endurance and the adoption of an anthropophagic paradigm<sup>4</sup> that encourages ample and necessary recombination of cultural elements. This anthropophagic paradigm and the creative process fuelled by it, is one of example of the ‘wake work’ employed to counteract the brunt of living in the ‘afterlives of slavery’.

The growth of these festivals from retention to recombination to celebration of freedoms are founded on multiple formations of cultural production. Music production is the most essential to the enactment of these festivals annually. Carnivals cannot occur without music; This music that animates, exemplifies and acts as the soundtrack for every activity during carnival. Carnivals and their music fashion unique

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<sup>2</sup> Spatial conditions refer to the role and usage of the three-dimensional realm or expanse in which all material objects are located and all events occur.

<sup>4</sup> The concept was first employed in the Anthropophagic Manifesto published in 1928 by the Brazilian poet and polemicist Oswald de Andrade. It suggests a way of being that swallows internal and external cultures metaphorically “in order to elaborate them autonomously, and convert them into an export product” ( OMNIA SOLUÇÕES WEB Eireli, 2024)

collective experiences that promote community, the shaping of identities and building awareness around constructive cultural and universal values (Vega, 2022). In addition to these important social and cultural contributions, their growth has also made their economic contribution significant. In a 2022 study conducted by the IDB, it is reported that the 'industry of carnivals and festivals' grew at one of the fastest rates in the last decade compared to other areas (Vega, 2022). Innovation in creative industries are key to this growth and are essential to the staging of carnivals in the Americas. The production of music and the sector that makes it happen is also built on innovation that emanates from social interaction situated in specific spaces and communities. It is important to explore the links between spatiality and creativity.

### ***Milieus of creativity and spatiality***

Early studies exploring creativity focused on the individual and his/her faculties, skills and inclinations. Little focus was placed on the environmental and spatial structures which we know today, undoubtedly plays a role in determining available resources, learning processes and social interactions (Meusburger, 2009). Scholars in the social sciences and management from the 1940s onwards began to focus on the relationship between the creative individual, the problem that needs to be attended or solved and the environment in which he/she exists (with reciprocal impacts between all these elements).

It was accepted that creative individuals are embedded in particular environments capable of either fostering or hindering their creativity and that cognitive processes are guided not only by personal capabilities or intrinsic motivation but also by interactions with and influences of the environment. When referring to environmental variables, though, most authors mentioned only organizational, cultural, socioeconomic, or political factors. They disregarded the spatiality of creativity and the role of places and spatial contexts. Processes of learning and gathering experience are inseparable from interactions with a specific environment and from situational challenges (Meusburger, 2009, p. 2)

The work of human geographer Peter Meusburger is key in the exploration of the link between space and creativity - asking why highly creative individuals are not evenly distributed over time and space, and highlighting the crucial role of particular milieus in which individuals are raised, trained, and embedded. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century interest grew in investigating the reason for spatial disparities in creativity<sup>5</sup>, how creative process and knowledge generation are preformed and impacted by spatial contexts<sup>6</sup>, settings and relations. Several perspectives evolved out of this research - that creativity requires interaction over time in specific contexts, sensitivity to what is happening and the ability to read the environment. In studies on creativity, space is central. Most definitions of creativity include that products of the creative process must not only be novel and valuable but also relevant to the spatial context in which they reside. Meusburger theorised how creativity is determined in space as he states, "the various personal, organizational, material, cultural, and political factors affecting creativity interact, merge, and modify each other in specific places or areas and lead to spatially rooted macrophenomena called milieu, environment, action setting, context, or "knowledgescapes"(2009, p. 111).

Analysing milieus' impact on creativity can be done using the categories of impacts outlined in Table 1.

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<sup>5</sup> Why certain cities/regions and historical periods have been characterized by significant levels of creativity in the visual arts, music, science and other sectors.

<sup>6</sup> "spatial context is conceptualized as a social macrophenomenon that represents a totality of interdependent factors of influence. It is an intersection of various social, cultural, economic, and material spheres or matrices." (Meusburger, 2009)

| <b>Categories of places, environments and contexts' impacts on creativity</b>                 | <b>Concepts</b>  |
|---|--|
| Macroscale – the persistence of large-scale disparities of socioeconomic structures over time | Spaces with/without preconditions or antecedents of creativity – investment, resources, risk-taking, enabling/capacity-building institutions that impact creative processes                |
| Mesoscale – organizational cultures and climates  | Enabling or inhibiting climates reduction of uncertainty and complexity, group composition, organizational culture, environmental stimuli, leadership, group work/collaboration            |
| Microscale – personal traits of creative individuals and their relation to the environment    | Characteristics, traits and constraints that relate to, enhance or correlate with creativity proclivity - not innate but derived from interaction between the creative and the environment |

Table 1 – Categories of places, environments and contexts impacts on creativity (Meusburger, 2009)

These thematic categories are important for the analysis of how space is critical to the composition of soca and axé music. In his discussion around milieus of creativity, Meusburger concludes that the research around the relationship between space and creativity is insufficient and leaves many areas for future research. Overall, milieus of creativity have been understood in the field of human geography using the metaphor of a seedbed in agriculture – there are many variables required for a planted seed to sprout. The quantity, quality, method of application timing of application and the interaction between all the variable and materials involved in the process frame and determine what is or is not produced from a given seedbed (Meusburger, 2009). The exact mysterious nature and difficulty in determining formulas for success in a seedbed applies to milieus of creativity as sites for cultural production.

Recently, two researchers (Glăveanu and Moeran) in the fields of social psychology and organizational anthropology respectively have explored the impact of affordance theory on creative individuals. Moeran's research, “find their creativity constrained as well as enabled, and how the cumulative experience of encountering affordances imbues identity” (Culpepper, 2018). His work points to spatial affordances - the choices creatives make about the where to create, display and perform their works that range from physical to digital spaces. Culpepper summarises that “Glăveanu's theory of creative affordances (2012, 2013, 2017) suggests that environment, objectives, and cultural standards form the backdrop for individual action, possibly better detailing the process of eminent and professional creators.

Many of the assumptions and conclusions that emanate from research on spatiality and its impact on creativity may not smoothly apply to the Caribbean and Latin American environments in focus. One example of a challenge with conceptual applicability to the focus regions is with the idea that milieus of creativity typically enable creativity. Simonton argues that in some contexts, challenging environments and less than optimal conditions can stimulate and nurture unique creative abilities (1994).

## **Methodology**

The qualitative methodology adopted focuses on the lived experiences of carnival music composers in the Caribbean and Brazil and stems from the inherent need to explore the complex socio-cultural

contexts that underpin artistic creation. Qualitative methods provide a rich and nuanced understanding of individual experiences by inquiring into their stories which help to capture and understand their diverse perspectives,, experiences, analysing patterns in behaviour and examining their implications are a key part of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015). The use of qualitative methods to interpret how meaning is constructed is particularly suitable for uncovering the multifaceted dimensions impacting carnival music composition.

### *Participants*

Participant selection was a meticulous process, considering the constraints imposed by COVID-19. The study was conducted with a total of 21 interviewees – 8 composers of axe music and 1 management member of a major Bloco Afro<sup>7</sup> in Salvador, 11 composers of soca and 1 management member of a market research organization. The study attempted to identify composers who had at least 10 years of professional experience and a body of work that had been interpreted by popular artists on the carnival music landscape. The interviewee selection process followed the procedures of intentional sampling, using the snowball technique to make contact with composers in Brazil. In Trinidad, a similar method was employed by using an initial list of composers acquired from the Copyright Music Organization of Trinidad and Tobago (COTT), ensuring a relevant sample.

### *Data collection*

The utilization of semi-structured interviews was deliberate, offering a balance between flexibility and structure to elicit in-depth narratives from composers about their lived experiences and cultural influences. The interview guide script was inspired by Dr. Juniper Hill’s categories in her 2011-2013 study “Sociocultural enablers and inhibitors of musical creativity: A cross-cultural comparison” (2013). Due to the limitations of movement caused by COVID-19 regulations, all interviews with composers of axé music were done in Portuguese via the Zoom platform and recorded. Composers of soca also found videoconferencing convenient, so interviews were recorded in English via Zoom.

### *Data Analysis*

Each interview was transcribed (both those in English and Portuguese), and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and overarching themes. Simultaneously, content analysis was applied to categorize and interpret specific elements within the interviews, adding depth to the exploration of nuances in the lived experiences of the composers. This combination of thematic and content analysis methods ensured a comprehensive and rigorous qualitative analysis aligned with the objectives of the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

The presentation of the results is based on the categories of impacts on creativity by places, environments and contexts in Table 1. Direct quotes that illustrate perspectives from composers interviewed on the various levels of impacts and are the bases of the narratives are presented in Table 2.

| <i>Categories of spaces impacting creativity</i> | <i>Representative quotes from composers interviewed</i>  |
|--|--|
| <b>Macroscale</b>                                | The conditions to do what we do is the minimum possible, but we manage to draw strength to be able to do our work. Our conditions are terrible, we don't have a studio. We don't have spaces to show our work; We don't have |

<sup>7</sup> Blocos Afros are Carnival groups, usually neighbourhood based that organize African themed carnival participation during Salvador’s carnival

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
|                   | <p>encouragement from the media, from society, right? Especially us Afro-Brazilians, we have no incentive, it is very difficult. (Axé composer 1)<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Just growing up in a space that had so much of vibrations around it, so much energy, so much expression inside the home, right outside your door. That Belmont community. Carnival was all around, and I realized that that just soaked into me from early. I had my first Jouvay experience at nine years old. It was deep, raw, real. [Wow]. The music, the vibes, the sensation of it stuck with me” (Soca composer 1)</p>   |
| <b>Mesoscale</b>  | <p>I was in Toronto sharing a space with Preacher (calypsonian). We had gone up for Caribana, and Elswood James, who was the promoter at the time, had this huge mansion that he had all the artists staying in. And the nice thing about that is that you have common areas and everybody kind of ‘vibes-in’ together. And at one of those sessions, Preacher asks me “what, you can't write your own song?! “I say, well, no, I don't know how to write.” So, he picked up his guitar. He said, “Come, let me show you these four chords, with these four chords, you could practically write any song”(Soca composer 2)</p> <p>There are challenges with female composers’ participation because of the organizational culture which is male dominated – even when incentives are offered to female composers many female composers who were invited to enter the competition did not and cited previous uncomfortable experiences of harassment, violations and historical exclusion – there is a call for sustained incentives and change in cultural behaviours.<sup>9</sup> (Axé interviewee 2)</p> |
| <b>Microscale</b> | <p>Humility is fundamental, wanting to learn is fundamental, listening to people who are in the market and who are doing what we want, who are at the level we want to reach, guide us (Axé composer 3)<sup>10</sup></p> <p>You see being an artist, actually being on a stage performing, touring, feeling the pull of the crowd, being on the road for carnival. Those things are important boy because you have to be able to reach into the experience of the person you are writing for. (Soca composer 3)</p>  |

Table 2 Representative quotes from composers interviewed by categories of spatial impact

### Macroscale – socioeconomic structures over time

<sup>8</sup> Aqui, principalmente aqui na Bahia e Salvador, nós temos todas as dificuldades da linha do tempo do nosso... Que o nosso povo herdou né; dessa má divisão de renda, e dessa concepção perversa, que a escravidão ao longo do tempo, trouxe até nós né. A nossa condição, para fazer o que a gente faz é a mínima possível, mas, nós conseguimos tirar do Incrível forças para poder “fazer nosso trabalho. As nossas condições são péssimas, nós não temos estúdio. Nós não temos espaços para mostrar nosso trabalho; nós não temos incentivo da mídia, da sociedade né. Principalmente nós afro-brasileiros, não temos nenhum incentivo, é muito difícil.”

<sup>9</sup> Não adiantou muito, porque muitas das mulheres também por serem historicamente excluídas, ou já terem tido experiência em participar de festivais de um bloco afro que tem o esqueleto, a sua vértebra muito masculinizada. Então eu acho que tem um trabalho a ser feito muito mais requintado, até durante o ano para que essas mulheres se sintam mais confortáveis dentro dessas instituições. Porque é muito difícil, por exemplo, você ir se inscrever no festival e está ouvindo piadinha ou você ter sido assediada ou violentada de alguma maneira e forma e o bloco acha que é natural, entende, porque é da cultura do bloco.

<sup>10</sup> humildade é fundamental, querer aprender é fundamental, ouvir as pessoas que estão no mercado e que estão fazendo aquilo que a gente quer, que estão no nível que a gente quer chegar orientam

The socioeconomic structures that frame the composition of soca and axé music are akin to the metaphor of seedbeds and soil in which creativity is rooted. These structures and the conditions they bolster have important impacts on how creative processes occur. They shape the milieu in which composers are raised, trained and embedded. As discussed earlier, these structures are outgrowths of the European colonial project – the wake. In terms of demographics, 85% of composers interviewed were of African descent (89% of axé composers interviewed and 83% of soca composers interviewed - 90% interviewed were male and 10% female).

Many composers reported that they spent their childhood and formative years in rural or marginalised/peripheral communities (bairros periféricos in Bahia). In many cases these communities/neighbourhoods were settled predominantly by people of African descent and evolved as informal settlements of the disenfranchised and emancipated formerly enslaved both in Trinidad and Brazil. Although characterised by limited organized facilities and structures, these neighbourhoods are seedbeds of African cultural musical traditions and legacies e.g. in Salvador - Cabula, Curuzu, Pelourinho, Cajazeiras, Cosme de Farias, in Trinidad – Friendship Village, Egypt Village and Belmont. Most interviewees recounted the presence of people-centred, enabling and capacity building institutions connected to music making. Composers of both soca and axé related the presence of African spiritual/religious spaces (e.g. Candomblé terreiros, Rada/Yoruba yards) where many musical skills and techniques were cultivated, or exposure provided. The presence of carnival-oriented institutions that facilitated musical capacity building through competitions or activities impacted both genres. The action settings and spatial contexts created in these environments and institutions play pivotal roles in the concentration of domain-specific (music) experts and knowledges, the transfer of music related skills, the magnetism of music making and some opportunities. Several community-based activities such as clashes were used to stimulate interest, showmanship and provide mechanisms for the practice and honing of musical expertise.

On the other hand, several key challenging impacts on the macroscale exist. In addition to limited resources, poor conditions, the lack of cultural production related infrastructure, limited access to formal musical training or education opportunities and limited or no government incentives, composers also cited sociocultural impacts. One notable impact is the psychosocial effect of composers feeling that they and what they do are not valued in the music and carnival ecosystem. Because the majority of composers interviewed are of African descent, many psychosocial impacts are buttressed by the possible presence of post traumatic slave syndrome and its effects i.e. vacant esteem, ever present anger and racist socialization among other things (DeGruy, 2017). Several composers related that culturally and in the carnival environment, music composition was always eclipsed by performance. The assessment of this segment of cultural production as less glamorous, less impactful and less contributory was something that they confronted in interactions with others and internally. Another challenging impact in the macroscale is the concentration of decision-making and investment power for the industry in small elite groups. This concentration of power impacts the access that composers have to their clients (performing artists) or opportunities to perform their compositions themselves. In both genres, composers commented on how this group of powerbrokers not only regulate access but have been instrumental in facilitating the appropriation of the musical form to some degree e.g. the increased presence of white musicians and lead singers, and utilisation of the music's emotive power for income generation of other economic sectors e.g. alcoholic beverages, party promoters and carnival organizations. These are examples of the facilitation of music composition as cultural production via investment and resource allocation towards strategic economic activities. The feedback from composers of both genres of carnival music bear witness to the fact that the macroscale impact on creativity is considerable. It reflects that in the wake, large-scale disparities of socioeconomic structures persist and have tangible and psychosocial repercussions on musical creators and their processes.



### *Mesoscale – organizational cultures and climates*

Many studies have been conducted and meta-analyses done on the impact of the environment on creative processes in/by organizations. One notable study done by Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, and Herron summarises the positive stimuli of the environment on creative production as enabling creativity through information circulation, the provision of degrees of autonomy, resources required and positive pressures/challenges. Conversely, environments also inhibit creative production through the provision of negative pressures, organizational barriers and cultural relational challenges (in group dynamics, bureaucracy, hierarchies and leadership styles for example) (1996).

At the foundation of enabling climates for the composers interviewed, are the social structures and networks. Networks of family members, friends, colleagues and community members serve to provide stimuli and reduce complexities and uncertainties connected to the creative process and cultural production. These networks seem to take on informal organizational roles and functions and shape/impact the creative environment in the same way that formal organizations do. Some of the significant ways this is done are for example the provision of opportunity, the transmission of competence/organizational intelligence, the archiving of memory, and the provision of conditions, places and action settings for collaborative creative production and partnerships. Places and action settings are critical for cultural production. Composers stated that cultural, religious, community and social institutions/organizations play a big role in the provision of these spaces that are the contexts for community building and collaborative cultural production. The contemporary virtual environment of social media was referenced by several composers as a new environment that provides enabling opportunities for communication, connection and collaboration that was not previously available to creatives.

On the other hand, the impact of organizational climates and cultures at the mesoscale was cited as contributing to the limited presence of female composers. One interviewee connected with a community-based carnival institution in Salvador, referred to conversations she had encouraging female composers to participate in an annual competition for the theme songs of the group. Many female composers declined to participate and indicated that their decisions were based on their observation of the male-dominated creative environments and connected experiences of discrimination, ridicule, violation and impediment. Outside of negative individual experiences, she also noted that even when the organization's carnival theme was women-centred in 2020, and incentives established to encourage female composers, they were not accessed and were temporary rather than a part of a sustained movement for cultural and organisational change. If environments and spaces are to become more enabling for all composers (especially female ones) challenges and prohibitive organizational cultures like these must be addressed.

### *Microscale – personal traits of creative individuals and their relation to the environment*

Space and place do not only shape the conditions that impact cultural production but in so doing they also shape the personal traits and characteristics of creatives. The pursuit of key relationships “constitutes the action at the core of creativity” that is a potentiality and “never fully known until the maker processes it” (Culpepper, 2018).

Heavily present in the accounts of composers interviewed are the creative possibilities created through spaces and places that afford enabling relationships. These relationships in family, educational settings and community, engender open cognitive frameworks, stimulate motivation and the development of ego and autonomy in composers. Composers referenced the acknowledgement of gifts, innate talents and capacities through interaction with key people in their environment. Some composers acknowledged industry opinion leaders and decision makers who played important roles in providing opportunities and validation of their creative products, which impacted esteem and their ability to see music composition as valid, rewarding work. These experiences amplified continued motivation to

engage in cultural production and helped with ego development. Other composers interviewed commented on their sensitivity to the environment, acuteness of perception and observation being cultivated and enhanced by the spaces in which they exist and move - from the households with musical activity, neighbourhood spaces brimming with music, surrounding natural spaces, to festival and performance spaces that allow them to channel natural energies, the energy and pull of the audiences and experiencing the dynamism of performance. The curiosity and attraction to music and music making is expressed as instinctual, vibrational and enhanced by the capacity of composers to be 'sponge like'; to absorb musical elements and methods in the environment. References to personal traits and characteristics that can enhance the creative process based on the environment were also made. Commentary on the benefits of institutional awareness, listening to subject matter experts, discipline, strong work ethic, dedication, reflection on personal experiences, the desire to express what is felt, humility, sociability/the ability to relate to others, and curiosity were related. Although interviewees generally spoke of the enabling impacts of the environment on their personal development, one soca composer mentioned an environmental/cultural proclivity of many creatives with technical expertise he encountered being reluctant to share their knowledge.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Carnival music genres like soca and axé may on the surface seem to be the fuel for street parades and public parties and 'freeing up' only, However, the music produced serves as cultural archives and collective communication. Those involved in the composition of this music are as Gauntlett explains, "ordinary people who not only hold the potential for innovation but also perform as change agents in their contexts. By transforming their materials, their identities, and their social worlds, people can accumulate the capabilities to solve problems both big and small" (2018).

Given the understanding that the realities of many people who are involved in music composition are framed by the wake, (socioeconomic environmental structural inequalities and continued violences) means that creative processes and production flourish despite spatial realities. In fact, the prevalence of disparities and challenges presented by macroscale socioeconomic structures and conditions contribute to the preeminence of relationships towards the manoeuvring of available resources and creation of milieus of creativity. Through greater explorations and understanding of the link between space and cultural production in the Caribbean and Latin America (and how they determine the social relationships that drive cultural production) we can begin to be more strategic and intentional about shaping more enabling creative environments for the people who sustain our festivals. Because according to granny Gussie Mae, why engage in arts management 'if it ain't helping nobody'.

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