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> If we so-called decent people want to protect ourselves from the jibes of the barefooted let us give them proper example.
>
> – Captain A.A. Cipriani, 1934

In order to contemplate the calypsonian as an artist, one must first consider the nature and evolution of the calypso as an art form. My own approach to this task has been to examine various theories about the evolution of calypso out of a complex of African song forms and via the absorption of varieties of European, West Indian, Latin American, North American and, later, Indian musics. I have found it useful to explore linkages among the content, the social and performance contexts, and the form and function of the music. Of these elements, function is the one that has changed least over time. This is probably because function has always been multifaceted. Calypso music today still performs most of the functions of its ancestor musics: celebration, censure, praise, blame, social control, worship, moralizing, affirmation, confrontation, exhortation, warning, scandal-mongering, ridicule, the generation of laughter, verbal warfare, satire.

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Certain basic structures have also survived over time. Of these, the call-and-response structure, the cornerstone of African music, has been replicated in the scores of "party songs" that are composed each year. Group participation remains a major activity with singer or rapper or exhorter, the person in control of the microphone, replacing the chantwel. As in the work song of old, the function of the party song is to induce participation by large groups of people in simultaneous activity. Today's activities are usually spelled out by the exhorter and involve movement of specified parts of the dancer's anatomy in specified directions. Some of this performance style may have been derived from American-styled aerobic exercises. Other aspects of current celebratory performance resemble British punk concerts of the 1980s, with their high levels of physical contact, extreme loudness and dangerous gimmicks such as body-surfing.

One begins with celebration, not only because it is the function that has endured but also because without the music of celebration it is unlikely that most of the other song types would have survived. Moreover, in diasporan African societies there has always been a link between celebration and freedom. The weekend dance assembly should therefore be recognized as the major institution through which African identities were celebrated and renewed both before and after emancipation. These dance assemblies usually took place between Saturday afternoon and Sunday night and constituted a welcome break from the plantation ménage. Enslaved Africans exercised a symbolic or virtual freedom at these assemblies, where they danced "nation dances" – dances that catered for and hence recognized specific ethnic communities.

Festive space was freedom to celebrate identities that were separate and different from the powerfully imposed but by no means absolute plantation identity as chattel, slave, functioning and expendable tool. From this festive space one was free to comment on differences between the "nations", and between the diasporan Africans as an undifferentiated mass of people and the Caucasian Other. If the dance assemblies were the context of performed "freedom" before emancipation, Carnival evolved as the grand stage upon which identities were asserted, contested and performed in the post-emancipation period. *Jamette Carnival* of the 1860s to 1880s was the result of the phenomenal inflow of immigrants from the southern and eastern Caribbean into both rural and urban spaces in Trinidad. The impact of such immigration was to increase the degree of conflict, confrontation and contestation among the various Afro-Caribbean ethnic communities, as well as between the stereotyped and undifferentiated mass of immigrants and those white, coloured and black Trinidadians who considered themselves to be the true nationals because of their prior residence in the island.

Naturally, intensified conflict and confrontation were reflected in the festive space of Carnival as well as in performance styles on the streets of Port of Spain. The old French Creole elite retreated from the street parade for nearly eight decades, aghast at the results of freedom. Many voices from among the "decent and respectable" citizenry called for the abolition of Carnival. As for the music, the most essential feature of and catalyst to celebration, this became the target of a consistent clamour that it should be controlled and, if possible, stopped. Citizens who gave evidence before the Hamilton commission of enquiry into the 1881 Canboulay riots complained bitterly not only about the greatly increased riot, disorder, obscenity and indecency of the masked performance but also about the Carnival songs:

> It is common during Carnival for the vilest songs, in which the names of ladies of the island are introduced to be sung in the streets, and the vilest talk to be indulged in while filthy and disgusting scenes are enacted by both sexes, which are beyond description and would be almost beyond belief were it not that they were vouched for by witnesses of unimpeachable credibility.[1]

Thus, if "freedom" in the street songs of Carnival took the form of class aggression performed in a style of scurrility and bawdy picong that deliberately unmasked the real disrespect that the never truly humble underclass felt for their social overlords, responsibility, as defined by the aggrieved elite, would require the vigorous policing of such freedom and include the censorship of street songs and the stilling, wherever possible, of voices from "the Barber-Green".[2] Such censorship proved to be impossible because the songs were, apart from their choruses, improvised by the chantwel and were part of what the Russian intellectual Mikhail Bakhtin, in his seminal study *Rabelais and His World*, termed "festive laughter".

Carnival laughter, festive laughter, is, according to Bakhtin, whose analysis was based on the carnivals of medieval Europe,

> not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival.[3]

1 R.C.G. Hamilton, "Report on the 1881 Camboulay Riots in Trinidad", reprinted as "The History of Canboulay: The Hamilton Report", *Vanguard,* 8 February 1969, 5.

2 "The Barber-Green" is a phrase coined by comedian Dennis Hall ("Sprangalang") to describe the environment of the urban underclass, Cipriani's "barefoot man".

3 M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 12.

Bakhtin goes on to distinguish between such all-inclusive festive laughter and the negative laughter of satire in which the satirist is wholly opposed to and "places himself above the object of his mockery".[4] One thinks right away of the difference between the real life Mighty Spoiler and Derek Walcott's fictional Spoiler, narrator of "The Spoiler's Return". The real-life Spoiler observed life's vagaries, its injustices, strangeness, absurdity, sadness in a humour that was at once corrosive and celebratory; Walcott's Spoiler, a thin mask for Walcott's rage, is literally located above the city, country and region that he bitterly castigates for its two decades of failed independence and the degeneration of everyone and everything since the end of the colonial period.

The bitterness of Walcott's laughter and the recurrent stance of exile, of alienated detachment that his protagonists, from Crusoe to Spoiler and Shabine, have assumed over the years, are paralleled to the last particular by the increasing acridity of calypsonians' laughter since the mid-1970s, the bitter violence of some of their social commentary in the 1990s, and their occasional assumption of stances above the world that they condemn. This may be partially the result of calypso having become the property of educated middle-class songwriters who may not, in fact, have anything more than a commercial affiliation with the world of the underclass who, in Bakhtin, create the festive laughter that he idealizes. Moreover, in multiethnic societies such as Trinidad and Tobago, where major ethnic groups are locked into grim and wasteful contestations for political and economic power and social visibility, it is a mistake to think of Carnival laughter or any other kind of laughter as "the laughter of *all the people*". Laughter in such societies, is more often than not a weapon to reduce or cut down the "enemy": the stereotypical ethnic Other.

Bakhtin's analysis is truer to our situation when he comments on the role of "corrosive laughter" in an age of radical political change and social upheaval, and commends Rabelais for his ability to "focus the power of laughter"[5] towards an illumination and interpretation of society in his age. Calypsonians have, in their various ways, consistently focused the power of laughter on society in Trinidad and Tobago, and the society has reacted in two ways: it either participated in the play, game and ritual of laughter or retaliated with hostility, lawsuit and the power play of insecure threatened officialdom. Against the freedom claimed by festive convention,

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., xxii.

threatened officialdom has traditionally placed the sanctions defined by law and power.

Before we illustrate this assertion and trace the history of official retaliation, we need to show how from quite early the calypso "focused the power of laughter" on the society of Trinidad and Tobago, which was in formation in the first five decades after emancipation. The extraordinary case of Dr Bakewell, an Englishman who was the chief medical officer in Trinidad in 1870, provides an early example of how the calypso focused the power of laughter. Bakewell is described by Bridget Brereton as having been "tarred and feathered in 1870 for insulting a coloured colleague";[6] and with slightly more detail by John Cowley, as having been thus humiliated "on the steps of Government House by three unknown Negroes" for having "clashed with Dr Espinet, 'a well-known and respected coloured Creole', regarding 'the treatment of leprosy' and offended both black and white inhabitants".[7]



Unfortunately for Bakewell, the incident occurred in January at the beginning of the Carnival season and was therefore celebrated in a calypso that was sufficiently famous to have survived in memory right into the mid-twentieth century.[8]

Bakeway, qui rive (Bakeway, what happen?
Qui moon qui fais ça (Who is the person who did this?
Is two blackman tar poppa (Is two blackman tar papa
Moen ça garde con you negre (I look like a Negro
Moen moen blanc mes enfants (Me, I am white, my children
Is two black man tar poppa (Is two black man tar papa
Is two black man tar poppa (Is two black man tar papa[9]

If the tarring and feathering – a startling punishment associated with the American post-bellum South – was bad enough, the fact that it took place on the steps of Government House suggests the complicity of the local elite. How else would three unknown Negroes have, complete with tar and feathers, found themselves at the steps of the governor's residence at the precise moment when, Bakewell appeared and, presumably, no other witnesses were present? Worst of all, though, was the

6 Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 162.

7 J. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67.

8 See, for example, R. Quevedo, *Attila's Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso* (Port of Spain: Department of Extra Mural Studies, University of the West Indies 1983), 9-10.

9 Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso,* 68.

immortalizing of the event in a song that focused the society's malicious laughter on the victim; the verbal tarring and feathering of one who, as chief medical officer, represented high British colonial officialdom.



Like the calypsos vilifying ladies of the elite by attributing to them the same sexuality that respectable society normally associated with the Jamettes, the song immortalizing Bakewell shows the calypso to have shared similar roots to Bakhtin's true Carnival of the unappropriated folk. Its laughter seeks to bring both the Caucasian ladies and Bakewell to a recognition of qualities that they share with the rest of the society: the quality of sexual desire in the case of the ladies and the quality of a common humanity beyond the fiction of a superior white skin in the case of Bakewell. Such corrosive, democratizing laughter was, of course, greeted with officialdom's call via the *Port of Spain Gazette* (9 March 1870) for a recognition of the moral authority of the church to "put an end to the obscene and disgusting buffooner" (*sic*) that characterized Jamette Carnival.[10] Morality, respectability and decency, as defined by an entrenched elite, have always sought to control or even abolish Carnival's festive laughter, particularly such laughter as has been focused on the elite itself to unmask an implied grossness beneath its surface of social superiority.

The history of the calypso for the century and a quarter that separates our time from that of Bakewell displays the same pattern beneath the kaleidoscopic facade of apparent social change. Calypso, and to some extent Carnival, have strived to celebrate and expand a special festive freedom and the scope of festive laughter: the instinct of elitism, respectability and officialdom has continued to be one of defining limits, outlining responsibilities and exercising a patronizing control over the spirit, shape and performance of festivity. This control was manifest in the Musical Ordinance of 1883, which was aimed at the surviving vestiges of African musical instruments and performance style; the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884, which was framed in January of that year to tame Jamette Carnival for good and later provided the legal justification for the massacre that came to be known as the Hosein Riots; the employment of sponsorship from small city businessmen after the 1890s as a means of social control of mas bands who lost the support of their patrons if they did not observe proper standards of behaviour; the renewed efforts to have Carnival abolished after the end of World War I and the vigorous response from first the *Argos* and the *Guardian* newspapers, whose committees for the preservation and improvement of

10 Ibid., 67.

Carnival ended in the founding of the parade of bands at the Queen's Park Savannah and at the same time initiated decades of tension between the advocates of downtown J'ouvert-centred, parochial, neighbourhood people's mas and those improved cleaned-up, well-costumed bands at the Savannah.

These developments can all be read as the ongoing attempt by first old then new middle-class elites to circumscribe carnivalesque freedom and festive laughter, whose three traditional features were, according to Bakhtin:

1. "Ritual spectacles", such as pageants and "comic shows of the marketplace";
2. "Comic verbal compositions", such as parodies both oral and written in Latin and in the vernacular; and
3. "Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons."[11]

Thus, in 1919, bourgeois caretakership of Carnival and calypso was formalized when Governor Chancellor made the *Argos* and the *Guardian* petitioners, people from the upper and middle classes, responsible for policing the freedom with which mas was celebrated that year. Part of that responsibility involved the intellectual enhancement of calypso lyrics via the collaboration of the intelligentsia with singers, composers and orchestra leaders. Anyone who thought he knew anything about poetry or calypso music sent in suggestions for calypso improvement to the *Argos* newspaper. *Argos* and *Guardian* committee members visited tents (calypso rehearsals) and made their suggestions regarding improvement. Those were the latter days of M'Zumbo Lazare and the early ones of Courtenay Hannays.

Middle-class cultural caretakership, revealed its political side when, over the next three decades, sectors of the population needing leadership because of the gradually expanding franchise of those days, turned to the middle-class intelligentsia and small business and professional people. In the midst of this emergence of new local leaders, there were strong signals that the old elite was not going to surrender hegemony without a real struggle. The Seditious Publications Ordinance of 1920, along with various smaller bits of legislation aimed at the control of the press and cinemas; the post-1945 Carnival Improvement Committee, with its agenda of purging the Carnival of Dame Lorraine, Pissenlit and rowdyism, and the making the festival safe for locals and tourists alike; and the enthusiastically sponsored Carnival Queen competition all suggested the same heavy hand of elitism, class-based legislation and cultural appropriation.

11 Bakhtin, *Rabelais,* 5.

A brief glimpse at, first, Section 7 of the Seditious Publication Ordinance and, next, the circumstances surrounding the drafting of the Theatres and Dance Halls Ordinance in 1934 is instructive. Section 7 of the bill provided for "the prohibition by the Supreme Court of the issue and circulation of any seditious publication which is shown to the satisfaction of the Court to be likely to lead to unlawful violence or apparently to have the object of promoting feelings of hostility between different classes of the community".[12] "Seditious intention" was elaborately defined under twelve categories, echoes of which have survived to this present time.

The Seditious Publications Ordinance was not, of course, aimed at so small a target as the calypso but was, rather, the effort of the old colonial order to assert its authority in the face of the threat of Garveyism, emergent trade unionism, radical journalism, and what was perceived to be a plot to destroy organized government and to eliminate the white population via an organized boycott of white merchants by the black population and the education of black children in black ethnic consciousness. Between 1921 and 1937, the list of banned socialist or Afrocentric or trade union–oriented pamphlets and books had become extremely long. Although the Seditious Publications Ordinance was not primarily aimed at the calypso, it is significant that when Patrick Jones sang denouncing it as an example of "class legislation", the *Guardian,* which had rapidly rivalled the much older *Port of Spain Gazette* as the mouthpiece for Caucasian upper-class interests and had propagandized the idea of a racist anti-Caucasian plot, wrote an article saying that Jones should be changed with sedition – by the power of the very ordinance that he was denouncing.

The 1934 Theatres and Dance Halls Ordinance was introduced by the inspector general of constabulary, Mavrogordato, to quell the publicizing via calypso or calypso drama of a sexual scandal in which he had been involved at the country club in the previous year. Section 6 of the ordinance codified decades of censorious upper-class opinion since the Hamilton Report of 1881. It prohibited "profane, indecent or obscene songs or ballads"; stage plays or songs that might be "insulting to any individual or section of the community, whether referred to by name or otherwise"; "acting or representation calculated to hold up to public ridicule or contempt any individual or section of the community". It also prohibited "lewd or suggestive

12 G. Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: G. Rohlehr, 1990), 104. Quoted from the *Weekly Guardian,* 13 March 1920.

dancing" and "violent quarrelsome or disorderly conduct" and advocated decent attire for all performers and dancers.[13]

The Theatres and Dance Halls Ordinance was immediately objected to by Captain Arthur Cipriani on the grounds that laws already existed to cover most of the areas that the Ordinance purported to cover. It would, he said, be virtually impossible to censor calypso innuendo out of existence or to control insult or caricature, particularly if the object of such ridicule was not openly named in the calypso. He supported the calypsonian's right and the general right of the underclass to festive laughter as a tradition or convention that should not be interfered with.



> These people have an extraordinary way, if you like, rightly or wrongly of amusing themselves and singing ballards [*sic*] and making references to certain people highly or lowly placed in this community, and it is a privilege which they have had for years. It has never been interfered with, and I see no reason why it should be interfered with now.[14]

Cipriani also made the telling point that members of the aristocracy should not be allowed to make laws simply to protect themselves from scrutiny and censure: "If we so-called decent people want to protect ourselves from the jibes of the barefooted man let us give them proper example."[15]

Here, written large and coming to a head, was the clash between the festive laughter of Carnival and calypso and the power of elitist officialdom to pass laws that aimed at limiting the freedom of singers and performers to explore festive space. Law could be manipulated by a class-in-power-and-authority to limit or even annul a freedom that, hard-won, had become convention. Like the Seditious Publications Ordinance of 1920, the Theatres and Dance Halls Ordinance was passed to protect a class and a race in power from the scrutiny of an underclass whose carnival style had permanently entered the area of serious political discourse.

Post–World War II efforts at "Carnival improvement" would, insofar as they applied to calypso, focus on the issue of "cleaner lyrics". The sexual theme had become more pronounced since the Yankee invasion between 1941 and 1945. A decade before Sparrow, the original Young Brigade had begun the unmasking of the ribald, risqué calypso, perhaps to make their meaning crystal clear to the soldiers whose patronage had ushered in a new age of entertainment and revenue.

13 Ibid., 290.
14 Ibid., 291.
15 Ibid.

Forces unleashed during the war would culminate first in the 1950 court case against the Growling Tiger (singer) and Attila the Hun (tent manager) who together had been charged for Tiger's performance of "Daniel Must Go". Tiger's other calypso for the year, "Leggo the Dog, Gemma", was held to be even more scurrilous than "Daniel Must Go". However, since it was impossible, as Cipriani, long dead, had predicted, to prove anything at all against "Leggo the Dog, Gemma", the prosecution based its case on "Daniel Must Go", a calypso that was no more than a fairly accurate description – so the defence argued – of a court case in which the acting director of education, an Englishman, had been charged for drunken driving after a cocktail party. He had driven his car off the road and knocked down a pedestrian. Tiger commented on the country's need for sober people to direct its education. He also expressed dissatisfaction at the acquittal of Daniel by the court on some legal technicality, the type that has always worked to be advantage of the ruling elite. Nothing much came of the case against Tiger and Attila, but the incident does reinforce the point we have been exploring, that elites in power tend to manipulate the law to protect themselves against dissent or satirical scrutiny, or what we have been terming the festive or carnivalesque laughter of the "little black boys" from the underclass.

This brings us to the decade of 1956 to 1966, the age of Sparrow's early dominance. During that decade, calypso freedom was practically rewritten, the boundaries redefined by Sparrow, whose risqué calypsos were more risqué than any had ever been before. His political calypsos, blending raw vitality with pointed commentary (for example, "PAYE", "No Doctor No", "Leave De Dam Doctor", "Solomon Out", "Get to Hell Outa Here") also set new boundaries for incisive criticism at a time when Dr Eric Williams held the nation spellbound in the palm of his hand. His gyrations on the stage, the truly grotesque, macabre laughter of something like the "Congo Man", would certainly not have been possible and, if possible, would not have been permitted in the 1930s.

So there was no doubt that calypso freedom had been increased and redefined in every particular. Sparrow was in every way the incarnation of the festive spirit of Carnival. There were the grotesque excesses in sexuality; the assertion of a sort of phallic kingship that was reflected in every movement of his performance. There was the constant head-on confrontation with official values of decency and respectability. There were even the violent physical encounters between Sparrow and a succession of antagonists, some of which led to court cases; and there were, framing and underlying all these, rhythm, life-pulse, celebration, excess, self-assertiveness, the boasting rhetoric of the traditional warrior-hero.

Obviously, this spirit would be confronted by the spirit of censorship; the old spirit of plantation, church, law court that always ruled: or that had always made the rules, defined the values by which the Jamettes must be forced to live, even though the lawmakers had themselves the poorest possible track record for living what they preached. Between 1956 and 1966, the large issue was the denial of airplay to calypsos during the Lenten season. Sparrow was consistently condemned for having "changed'' the calypso. It was he, they said with a bitterness that has lasted to this day, who had unmasked its erotic drive. It was he, too, who had transformed its melodic structure, the pace of delivery, the style of performance. He had broken with sacred conventions of structure. He had blended the songs with love ballads and folk songs. He had sung songs composed by ghost writers when everyone knew that true-true calypsonians sang their own compositions. His songs degraded women or focused on women whom life had brought to degradation.

Sparrow's response to his critics was both direct and oblique. A calypso such as "Thanks to the Guardian" (1962) was a direct critique of the establishment press. Sparrow sarcastically commended the newspaper for all the free advertisement it had been giving him, by opening up its pages to so many of his critics. Interestingly, he ended by comparing his situation to that of Premier Eric Williams.

In "Outcast" (1963) he accused "society" in Trinidad of blatant hypocrisy. A class of people who had created nothing that was indigenous, who were even then in the process of appropriating both pan and kaiso as representative national forms, enjoyed the songs and music but were still full of prejudice against the singers and musicians: "And they bracket you in a category so low and mean / Man they leave the impression that your character is unclean." This was as direct and aggressive an attack or defence as one would find in Sparrow; the bulk of his response was quite oblique. The more he was attacked for his "phallic" songs, the more outrageously he would assume the mask of sexual rebel, violator of cherished taboos, or mocker of the respectable, the decent, the moral ethics squad and thought police of the socially conformist. How else can one explain the movement from "Jean and Dinah" (1956) and "May May" (1960) through "Keep the City Clean" (1960) and "Mr Rake and Scrape" (1961) to "The Village Ram" (1964) and "Congo Man" (1965)?

I read the last three as deliberate or unconscious attempts at rebellion by a technique that is common to all proletarian subcultures: that of accepting and according heroic status to the very quality and values that are rejected as antiheroic, antisocial and damnable by "respectable" society. So "Mr Rake and Scrape" presents the phallic hero as a sexual garbage collector. He is the man who rakes and scrapes,

who cleans up whatever ends of rubbish and filth remain on the road after the main bulk of it has been placed on the garbage truck, a sexual vulture of the lowest order of *corbeaux.* In "The Village Ram" he is the medieval ram goat of lust, insatiable, efficient and for hire; or, changing the metaphor, he is the world heavyweight champion capable of lasting and lusting the full fifteen rounds, respected worldwide for the power of his punch. In "Congo Man" he is a veritable cannibal of sexuality, eating his way into the socially forbidden and in his newly independent ex-colonial society, still largely inaccessible white meat. What is this but a thinly veiled and corrosive mockery of a society that had from its very foundation constantly but secretively been breaching the tabooed frontiers between white and black? Sparrow himself had married a white American in 1958 and had complained about the hostile gossip and social ostracism that followed on the marriage in "Everybody Washing They Mouth on Me" (1959).

Anywhere you go is the same talk
From the West Indies up to New York
Anywhere you go is the same talk
From the West Indies up to New York

Sparrow do this and Sparrow do that
Sparrow never hit they dog or they cat
Still for all they would not give me a chance
They interfering in my private romance

Everybody washing they mouth on me
I eh do them nothing but they giving they tongue liberty
They find that ah stupid
Because ah went and married to Emily
But ah love me wife and to hell with everybody

"Congo Man", then, attacks the most powerful taboo of colonial society, the taboo that sought to forbid black and white miscegenation, intercourse or love. That taboo was actually reinforced by the racist American Hayes Office Code of film censorship by which the representation in the movies of white and black love, sex or marriage was forbidden. Sparrow's persona crosses the line with a vengeance: he transgresses. Through him, Sparrow implodes the cannibal stereotype by seeming to celebrate it while at the same time turning on and laughing harshly and joyously at his critics, those who had throughout the decade argued for the censorship of his calypsos. "Congo Man", which grew out of news or rumours of Belgian nuns and priests being beaten, raped and killed in the Congo, is a daring, mocking, macabre challenge to the

"hypo-critics" of his society. Sparrow's cannibal laughs and giggles triumphantly as he defiles the ultimate symbols of decency and respectability by feasting on them. His is, quite literally, festive laughter!



Other and less obvious oblique attacks on the fortress of respectability are his three calypsos about governors: "Short Little Shorts" (1958), "Popularity Contest" (1963) and "The Governor's Ball" (1967), the last of which came at the end of his first decade as a calypsonian. In "Short Little Shorts" the calypsonian depicts the governor – still British, but increasingly irrelevant – as lusting after a young woman clad in "short little shorts". Respectability is no stranger to common desire. We recognize festive laughter such as had issued from the throats of nineteenth-century chantwels as they baited upper-class ladies about their secret sexual desire.

In "Popularity Contest" the target is the governor general of the short-lived West Indian Federation, Lord Hailes, whose social significance is being measured against that of Dr Williams, the popular, charismatic premier of Trinidad and Tobago, and Sparrow, the phallic hero of the *demi-monde,* the people's voice and the medium of their festive laughter. Lord Hailes hardly features in the competition which is reduced to a play-off between the Doc and Sparrow. The Doctor receives the vote of the father of the family, but Sparrow is chosen by the mother, the sister and the auntie and the big girl. Read now with hindsight, "Popularity Contest" is yet another calypso about the conflict of values in that transitional period. By whose measure and by whose standards would the society now accord social significance? Would the values and rituals of the old colonial order, as symbolized by Lord Hailes, prevail? Would they be replaced by whatever it is Dr Williams represented: the hope of the new black intelligentsia, as yet still nationalist and anti-imperialist?

"Popularity Contest" valorizes neither Hailes nor Williams. Instead, it celebrates the norms and values of the grass roots, what I have been terming the carnivalesque values of naturalness, fertility, unpretentious acceptance of one's sexuality – values of the visceral, the unadorned, the vital. Such values find their fullest expression in excess, comesse, "bacchanal", the erotic, the Dionysian. Hence the women's declaration that they have voted for Sparrow leads to "riot" in the house: "The father get ignorant." His own manhood and patriarchal authority have been challenged. Moreover, when the Doctor is measured against the proletarian hero/antihero Sparrow, he is seen as a little boy "making himself a pappy-show".

> The husband take off like a jet plane through the door
> To meet the Doctor at Piarco
> In no time at all he was out of Port of Spain

He reach the airport in the rain
Passing through the crowd he get a shock
People clapping and I was singing for the Doc
He say, "Who is that boy making himself a pappy-show"
A fellow say, "I ain't know, but he talking to Sparrow"

I am suggesting that these "governor" calypsos tell us something about the clash of values among the old-time colonial bourgeoisie, the new post-independence nationalistic bourgeoisie and the enduring everlasting proletariat who are destined to live through and beyond both of these absurdities; both the pappy-show of Lord Hailes and the equal and complementary pappy-show of the Doctor's politics of rhetorical nationalism.

In "The Governor's Ball" (1967) a madwoman is drawn by the rhythms of the police band to "storm" a governor general's ball. Since the madhouse and the governor general's residence are in close and perhaps symbolic proximity, the madwoman is able to climb over the wall that separates and protects sanity from insanity, and "invade" the prim propriety of the ball of the new elite. One recognizes in this situation another oblique example of the confrontation between carnivalesque freedom and repressed respectability. The old colonial elite has been replaced by a new elite, but the new elite, which had for decades been waiting in the wings for the death or departure of the old, has shaped itself in the image of its predecessor. Naturally, the new elite of invitees to the now local governor general's ball is as out of step with the pulse, rhythm, energy and spirit of the people's music as was the old stiff-arsed colonial upper crust.

The madwoman, a bacchant driven and filled with the spirit of the music, notices immediately that the fête is dead and tries to enliven first the governor and then the assembled guests.

. . . the woman shake she waist
In the Governor face
Telling everybody inside the place
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect
Shake it up again, shake it up again, mamayo
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect
Calypso! Calypso, maestro!
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect

The role of the madwoman here would be immediately understood in the 1990s, the age of the "command calypso", where the singer functions as reincarnated chantwel whose chief role is to harangue the audience into enthusiastic performance of the same

actions in the same sequence. Carnival, the madwoman knows, is about the loss of individualism in ecstatic communal abandon to the pulse of life, and this is what she tries to achieve with the governor's guests and, indeed, the perhaps too military and rigid police band.

The two men in "authority" at the fête, the bandmaster, Mr Antonio Prospect, and the governor general, Sir Solomon Hochoy, try in their different ways to restore order and propriety. Mr Prospect stops the band and Sir Solomon orders his guard to evict the madwoman. Neither strategy succeeds. The madwoman takes over conducting the band and the fête.

She said "If you won't conduct
This band it is your hard luck.
Now, fellows, One, Two, Three,
Follow me."

"That is how ah like to hear music play
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect."
And if you see how the madwoman break away
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect

Her response to the governor's attempt to have her evicted is to assume command of the guards as she had previously assumed command of the police band.

The governor tell the guard
Put this lunatic outside
The woman is really mad
And she should be tied
When the soldier make he move
She say "Whe you trying to prove?
I'm only having fun
Attention!"

"Now behave yourself and do as I say,
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect.
About turn!" The soldier turn around and walk away
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect
"Listen, soldier boy, leh me stay and enjoy the governor's ball
Shake your baton like Mr Prospect
Prospect don't stop at all."

Who is this magical madwoman who can hold the governor, the police band and the military spellbound; who literally and metaphorically takes hold of the phallic baton with which she conducts, controls and subverts the governor's ball by injecting

the spirit of revelry and mischievous laughter into the garden party of the respectable cultured? She is the spirit of Carnival itself, the muse of the Jamette *demi-monde* who, having taken command of the fête, ends as she began with a final attempt to vitalize the terrified Sir Solomon; no easy task.

> She hug up the governor
> Tighter than a rasseler [wrestler]
> "Now, Your Excellency,
> Dance with me!"

Her final command to Sir Solomon is, "Governor, leh we break away." To break away is to abandon oneself to the joy and "madness" of the moment, to break through to and release the repressed "other self". The governor's instinctive command to his guard to "put this lunatic outside" is a clear indication that he will never be able to enter into the spirit that she brings to his ball. When authority cannot break away or even break, it tends to retaliate by seeking to censor the freedom and abandon of those who, in Aimé Césaire's memorable phrase, "give themselves to the essence of things".[16] A great deal of the social history of Trinidad has involved this dance of apparent opposites: "freedom" to the point of total abandon, ecstatic "madness", versus "responsibility" to the point of repression, inhibition and censorship; the madwoman and the governor general; Sparrow and Doctor Williams; "three black man" and Dr Bakewell; the chantwels of the 1880s and the respectable ladies of Port of Spain; the Dionysian and the Apollonian; society and its double.

It was not only in the areas of class relationships and the representation of sexuality that notions of freedom and responsibility needed to be constantly defined and redefined. Many calypsonians also functioned as monitors of political discourse and behaviour. Some, such as Attila and Growling Tiger of the Old Guard or Sparrow and Blakie of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and Chalkdust, Valentino, Black Stalin Short Pants and Relator of the 1960s and 1970s, or Delamo, Luta, Cro Cro, Sugar Aloes, David Rudder and many more of the 1980s and 1990s, have been sharp and perceptive critics of the politics of their respective ages. As we have seen, the colonial authorities from the 1920s to the 1940s tried, through measures such as the Seditious Publications Ordinance and the Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance, to set strict limits on freedom of speech and expression. Such control, we also saw, did not prevent

16 Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land,* trans. John Berger and Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 75.

calypsonians, who viewed it as their responsibility, from making critical pronouncements on the politics of their times.



As the state set limits on freedom of speech and conscience, so did the calypsonians from Attila to Chalkdust, from the Growling Tiger to Cro Cro and Sugar Aloes proclaim their responsibility to speak for the underdog. In the process of becoming the people's voice, the calypsonians grew to recognize the necessity for expanding the space within which their voices might be given free play. Freedom of speech could easily become a meaningless empty notion – particularly in the post-plantation society with a history of censorship and repression – if such freedom were not vigorously and consistently exercised. We have identified a few of Sparrow's more critical political calypsos as part of this exercise of freedom, and we now will comment on Chalkdust's important contribution to the maintenance and extension of calypsonians' freedom.

Chalkdust's entry into the People's National Movement "Buy Local" calypso competition in 1966 worried no one. Buy Local calypsos were meant to support an important government economic initiative and were part of what the state liked to hear calypsonians doing: building the nation by encouraging the population to purchase locally produced commodities. Chalkdust's direct criticism in "Brain Drain" (1968) of Dr Williams's condemnation of skilled nationals who had begun to leave Trinidad in search of better opportunities abroad was a different matter altogether. By that time, Chalkdust had begun to appear as a regular performer at the Carnival Development Committee-sponsored calypso tent. He was also popular, and "Brain Drain" and "Devaluation" won him third place behind Duke and Sniper in the 1968 Calypso Monarch competition.

It was suddenly discovered that Chalkdust was a schoolteacher, a member of the public service and thus subject to regulations that prohibited the public servant from holding more than one job. The real problem, however, lay elsewhere, in the regulations that forbade public servants from making public statements on the political affairs of their country and particularly from offering criticism of the state's public policy. The freedom of the public servant was clearly and narrowly delimited in the regulations; the responsibility, too, it was implied, was to the employer, the state, whose elaborate machinery could, on little provocation, be programmed to work against the uncooperative subject. Chalkdust's great contribution to democratic freedom in Trinidad and Tobago lies in the fact that he challenged the ministry, the regulations and the malignant state machine.

Answering the charge that by singing nightly in a tent he was doing two jobs, he argued that as an employee of the Ministry of Education *and Culture,* he was serving the same master at two different venues, school and tent. In "Reply to the Ministry" (1969), he compiled case after case of public servants, including the director of culture, who were doing more than one job, and had been for years, and yet had not been questioned by their ministries. Chalkdust ventilated the issue via public lectures during the post-Carnival months in 1968 and won great public admiration when he made his deposition in kaiso the following season. (The last time this had happened had been a decade before, with Sparrow's "Ten to One Is Murder".) Holding and defending one's physical or metaphorical ground had always been the duty of chantwel, batonnier, traditional masquerader and calypsonian. Unmasking the real objective of the ministry as being the censorship of dissent, Chalkdust proclaimed his determination to speak out against any category of misdemeanour:

> But the boat they miss
> They should first fix
> All the bobol in the Civil Service
> To tackle me they wrong
> If they want to keep me down
> Tell them to cut out mih tongue

The rest, as they say, is history. Later public servants who sang political calypsos – Short Pants, Penguin, Luta, Watchman, Lady B, Kenny J – would be spared the type of harassment that Chalkdust had to endure in 1968.

The Chalkdust issue of 1968–69 resembles in one seminal respect all the other issues that we have been examining: the call for censorship or control of discourse, once such discourse runs counter to the official line. Censorship has assumed various shapes over the years since emancipation. At one time it has been the banning of drums and other African musical instruments; at another the prohibition of non-Christian religious practices; at another the declaration of radical counter-discourse, sedition. Normally, censorship masks itself under the euphemism of defining or prescribing limits, values and responsibilities; but whatever the mask, censorship is always promoted in the interest of a specific class, ethnic group or political order. The Theatres and Dance Halls Ordinance was, as we have seen, the most blatant example of this truth. There the inspector general of constabulary introduced a most elaborate ordinance in order to protect *himself,* and by extension his class, from the mocking lampoons of a calypsonian.

Since 1968 both the number and the aggressive corrosiveness of political calypsos have increased, as the bards and the politicians each year demarcate their space. The

calypsonian's role in this stickfight has been to extend both his right and his privilege to freedom of dissent as far as and beyond what the system will permit. There were over one hundred and fifty calypsos that commented directly and often critically upon the performance of Eric Williams as political leader and prime minister, and scores more that anatomized politics and social issues over the twenty-five years of Williams's stewardship.[17]

Williams was represented variously as a madman (Chalkdust, "Somebody Mad" [1972]); a devouring shark, Jaws (Chalkdust, in a calypso drama in the Independence Calypso Tent, August 1975); a deaf and vision impaired conductor of a deaf orchestra (Relator, "Deaf Panmen" [1974]); an evil sorcerer with the power of "goat mouth" (Chalkdust, "Goat Mouth Doc" [1972]); an incompetent deejay or proprietor who has lost control of his party (Stalin, "Breakdown Party" [1980]); "a horse that is tired and almost lame" (Relator, "Take a Rest" [1980]); a diseased mangy and headless horse adrift in a cemetery or racing complex (Delamo, "Apocalypse" [1981]); and an envious old voyeur badly afflicted with a hernia (Shorty, "The Doc's Sex Probe" [1975]).

There were, of course, adulatory calypsos that portrayed him as father, founder and lover of the nation (Bomber, "Political Wonder" [1970]); as genius, third or fourth most intelligent being in the galaxy; as godfather and patron not only towards his own people but toward the entire Caribbean (for example, Swallow's "Trinidad: The Caribbean Godfather" [1979]); and as leader and hero marching in the rain against Yankee imperialism (Duke, "Memories of '60" [1961]). But it is true to say that since Blakie's "The Doctor Ent Deh" (1965) and Chalkdust's "Reply to the Ministry" (1969), "Massa Day Must Done" (1970), "Two Sides of a Shilling" (1971), "Somebody Mad" (1972), and many more, calypsonians had extended their freedom considerably, while providing through their focused laughter a measure of the madness and disintegration that they perceived in the society.

The system's role in the national stickfight, performed by whoever is in power for a time or at the time, has been to stress the achievements of the regime in power, to emphasize the dignity and respect due to authority, and to threaten overt or covert reprisal against the irreverent calypsonian. Such reprisal has taken several forms: for example, lawsuit, as was the case with Shorty's "The Art of Making Love" (1974). One school of opinion, supported by Shorty himself, was that Chalkdust was the real target of

17 Louis Regis provides an excellent, detailed and balanced critique of the political calypsos in the first twenty-five years of independence. See Louis Regis, *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago 1962–1987* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1999).

the lawsuit, not Shorty. A coded warning was being sent out, a word to the wise. Dissenting calypsos were and usually are denied airplay. Radio station managers, fearful for their jobs, took care not to offend the powers that were by pre-censorship of all "offensive" songs. Deejays were served a list containing songs that were not to be played.

Calypsonians of the 1970s – Chalkdust and Stalin, especially – felt that the Calypso Monarch competition regularly discriminated against singers of political dissent. Throughout this period, singers such as Chalkdust were compelled to state and restate their own aesthetic as radical dissenters. (Hence "Juba Doo Bai" [1973]; "Calypso vs Soca" [1978]; "Quacks and Invalids" [1994]; "Why Smut" [1975].) We find Delamo ("Ah Cyan Wine" [1987]), Stalin ("Wait Dorothy" [1985]) and Cro Cro ("Support Social Commentary Calypso" [1996]) making similar defences and definitions of aesthetic in the 1980s and 1990s.

There are, then, and have always been, two sets of players in this ongoing drama of discourse. One party seeks to expand freedom, the other to limit it. Both parties seek their own self-interest. The one clings to convention, the other to law. Convention has always required negotiation, while law involves a constant clarification of limits, an erection of clean, insurmountable boundaries, whose extreme state is censorship, the imprisonment of the word and, if necessary, the assassination of the voice. The freedom that calypsonians habitually claim is based on convention. It is the freedom of traditional festive spaces in which roles are reversed, the powerless play at being powerful and – if the game is being correctly played – the powerful pretend to be humble and powerless. It is the freedom of the "fool" to criticize and caricature the king; the freedom of the old-time Feast of Fools when the lesser clergy either played or mocked at their betters.

This sort of freedom used to be understood to be transitory. It existed within the special festive space of Carnival but disappeared as Carnival ended and normal time re-established itself. Nothing better illustrates this reality than the calypso – the name I forget – that depicts a masquerader whose socially outrageous behaviour is tolerated throughout the two days of Carnival, but who is charged and sentenced to jail for playing mas on Ash Wednesday. Calypsonians' freedom was expected to be that of the masquerader, a time-limited phenomenon that was tolerated precisely because it was both temporary and confined to the tent's special and festive stage.

The problem was that, over the decades, the calypso tent evolved as a sort of popular equivalent to Parliament: a privileged space that exists not because authority has willingly sanctioned its existence but because it has, decade after decade, era after

political era, fiercely asserted and defended its own right to exist as a forum for the public articulation of whatever is officially unspeakable, for the public transgression into what is officially taboo, and for speaking one's mind either openly or behind a mask. In fulfilling these functions the calypso has been seeking a more permanent place in national discourse. It has been trying to extend the privilege of the tent, where one can state the outrageous, into the world of normal, daily discourse where the outrageous may also be the libellous. Gypsy's "Respect the Calypsonian" (1988) is perhaps the clearest statement on this desire among calypsonians to be respected as serious contributors to both celebration and political discourse.

The evolution of the social and political calypso has been similar to that of the Trinidad Carnival which has in all its faces, phases and manifestations been both the theatre and a metaphor of the process through which the still living drama of Trinidad's social history has been both encoded and enacted. Essentially, Carnival, like calypso, has been a celebratory mass/mas theatre of contested social space; a drama of ritualized verbal and violently physical challenge; the domain of the stickfighter, the Wild Indian, the Pierrot, the Midnight Robber, the chantwel, the pan man. The contestation of these carnivalesque figures with rhetoric or blows – often rhetoric and blows – was an enactment of the confrontation that has always been taking place within the social process itself.

It is, therefore, only natural, that the contemporary movement of the Indo-Trinidadian to political and socioeconomic centre stage via the masquerade of politics, should be reflected in the most recent contestations for space on the Carnival stage (see, for example, the efforts that have been made to invent chutney-soca and propel it towards centre stage in the state-sponsored Independence Monarch competition) and in the wider theatre of festivals in Trinidad (note for example, the keen contestation for funding and respectability between emancipation celebrations and Indian Arrival Day).

The calypsonian, master and keeper of all verbal codes within popular "Creole" culture, has assumed the role of decoder and unmasker of the new slogans and codes and masks that each regime of political chantwels has ambiguously employed to inspire society with notions of a desired ideal, and to conceal the distressing truth of our lived reality. Slogans such as the old watchwords enshrined in the national anthem have received a merciless exposure at the hands of calypsonians.[18] New slogans, such as

18 See G. Rohlehr, "The Culture of Williams: Context, Performance, Legacy", *Callaloo* 20, no. 4 (1998): 849–88.

George Chambers's "Productivity" and "Fête Over, Back to Work" or the National Alliance for Reconstruction's "One Love" and "Rainbow Country" or Manning's "World Class" and "Let us go down the road together and get the job done" or Panday's "National Unity", have all been cracked open, laid bare, subjected to the severe scrutiny of the calypsonians' focused scepticism. "Let us go down the road together," pleads Manning. "How Low?" asks Watchman (Watchman, "How Low" [1994]).

The calypsonian's impulse to unmask the politician as a "mocking pretender" is essentially the same as the impulse that the ancestral chantwel, Midnight Robber, batonnier or Indian chief felt to reveal and demolish any rival who had invaded his space. It is the ancient declaration of territorial rights, the age-old assertion of power-in-discourse projected through the medium of contemporary calypso. There is also the recognition that the present regime, which gained a few thousand votes less than the People's National Movement, came to power through the meretricious process of what Mr Panday termed "One Love on a UNC bed, in the House of the Rising Sun". The choice of imagery was clever but unfortunate; the House of the Rising Sun being, in the famous Nina Simone ballad, a whorehouse in New Orleans! Sugar Aloes in "The Facts" (1996) predicted, accurately enough, that the National Alliance for Reconstruction would be devoured in this second ordeal of "One Love", though Valentino in "To Love Again" (1996) was ecstatic that the nation had, through Robinson's arrangement with Panday, been permitted a second opportunity at national unity.

An aura of illegitimacy – by no means dissipated by the defection of Griffith and Lasse from the People's National Movement to the United National Congress, or the movement of Robinson from political leader of the National Alliance for Reconstruction to the supposedly non-political presidency – has hung around Panday's government, and this has certainly affected how calypsonians have represented the present regime. It has not helped that the prime minister has been trying hard to coerce the public into respecting him, while clinging tenaciously to the verbal register of the hustings. Threats – such as his promise that no one who attacks his "government of national unity" will escape unscathed; reference to striking teachers as "criminals" who should be treated as such for having neglected their charges; frequent attacks on the media; the haranguing of his supporters to "do them", that is the party's "enemies", "first"; and the rank-pulling reference to the harshly dissident calypsonians who have been the plague of his life as "semi-literate social deviants" – have done nothing at all to inspire confidence in his leadership.

In fact, the very opposite has happened, and calypsonians, who have been keepers of all verbal codes within the popular culture, have reacted to this rhetoric of taunt, threat and insult with a similar rhetoric of their own; taunt, threat and insult being, after all, the very substance of the register of the street. The politician, in turn, unable so far to censor the focused laughter and mockery of the calypsonian who relentlessly unmasks the true barrenness of the politician's discourse (see Rudder, "The Madman's Rant" [1996] and "The Savagery" [1998]; Chalkdust, "National Unity" [1996] and "Too Much Parties" {1998]; Pink Panther, "Mistakes" [1998]; Shortpants, "No Comment" [1998]; Sugar Aloes, "Ish" [1998] and "This Stage Is Mine" [1999]; Luta, "Pack Your Bag" [1998]; Penguin, "Criminals" [1997]; Lady B, "Dancing Time" [1999]) – has re-entered the time-honoured masks of insecure authoritarianism under threat. Those masks are censorship; the promise of recrimination; and the employment of state patronage as a form of bribery through which the calypsonian might be induced to compromise the fierceness of his attack or, better still, to remain silent about the discrepancies he observes between proclaimed ideals and the often distressing performance of the politician, or, best of all, to promote the slogans, clichés and agenda of the regime in power in something like the state-sponsored "nation-building" calypso-cum-chutney independence song contest of 1998.

As we have seen, the roles that are being played by both actors, the politician and the calypsonian, are traditional ones. Both players, indeed, seem to be caught up in a pattern of action and stereotypical reaction, in which the politician's excesses of rhetoric and threat are closely monitored by the calypsonian who then reproduces them in grotesque caricature on the festive stage of the Carnival tent. Watchman's "Mr Panday Needs Glasses" (1997), Sugar Aloes's defiant and insulting "Ah Ready to Go" (1998) and "This Stage Is Mine" (1999), Penguin's "Criminals" (1997) are all calypsos of reaction to one or other of the prime minister's rhetorical excesses, while Luta's "Pack Yuh Bag" (1998) advises the politician to retire in disgrace from the stage of picong, if he "can't take the jamming". Watchman in 1999, back from Africa and the stress of working as a United Nations peace-keeping officer, reacts to Panday's "we must do them first" harangue with the harsh but timely advice that picong and dissenting calypsos are a small price to pay for democracy, in a world where thousands are still dying in bloody struggles for freedom of choice and conscience ("Price of Democracy"; see also "Lessons from Africa" [1999]).

One interesting result of this fierce annual exchange between the prime minister and what he has called "[these] semi-literate social deviants" has been the introduction in March 1998 (just a week or two after the grand post-Carnival furore over Sugar

Aloes's "Ah Ready to Go") of a new clause, Clause Seven, hastily appended to the Equal Opportunity Bill. Clause Seven, which is entitled "Offensive Behaviour", reads:

1. A person shall not, otherwise than in private, do any act which:
   (i) is reasonably likely, in all circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate another person or group of persons; and
   (ii) is done because of the race, origin or religion of the other person, or of some or all of the persons in the group; or
   b. which is done with the intention of inciting racial or religious hatred.
2. For the purposes of sub-section (1) an act is taken not to be done in private if it:
   a. causes words, sounds, images or writing to be communicated to the public;
   b. is done in a public place
   c. is done in the sight and hearing of persons who are in a public place.[19]

According to *Express* journalist Jeff Hackett, one possible outcome of "this dangerous piece of nonsense" would be that

> Writers, artists, calypsonians, show business people, photographers, filmmakers, actors, comedians and people on the whole in the creative field, as well as trade unionists, politician and social activists, should this bill be enacted [would] risk being convicted and jailed for what civilised societies consider harmless activity.[20]

Clause Seven bears a curious resemblance to Section Seven of the Seditious Publications Ordinance of 1920 and the elaborate Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance of 1934. These three pieces of class legislation share, beneath the euphemism in which they are most righteously clothed, a common end: the control of dissent in the interest of a current ruling class. In 1920 and 1934 that ruling class constituted a deeply embedded oligarchy of British and local whites and off-whites, particularly the rump of French Creole families, who anticipated social turbulence and threat in the nascent labour movement. In 1998 the ruling order is an oligarchy in formation and on the road towards exercising a reciprocal parasitism that is distinguishable from the one that it replaces only through the fact that it is far more blatant.

Politically insecure, but in the process of uniting new money with old and thus securing the necessary economic basis for power, the oligarchy in formation is

19 Clause 7 of the Equal Opportunities Bill, as cited in J. Hackett, "Trampling on Equal Opportunity", *Express,* 14 April 1998, 9.

20 Ibid., 8.

apprehensive of the probing, often anarchic and aggressive wit of calypsonians. Seeking bourgeois respectability even as it retains the carnivalesque register of the streets – witness the robber talk, the *sans humanité*–type insults and the mixture of clownishness and gutter violence in certain aspects of its performance – the oligarchy-in-formation is afraid of caricature, the weapon of the society's underclass, of its bards, cartoonists, weekly journalists such as the *Mirror*'s Flagsman, lampoonists and comedians. It is afraid of being laughed at.

This confrontation between the street and the balcony, festive laughter and bourgeois propriety, is in fact the old colonial symphony in a new key and at a shriller, more hysterical pitch. For this time, the confrontation involves not a foreign minority versus a local majority seeking its democratic rights but the two large, if internally divided, ethnicities of Afro-Creoles and Indo-Creoles pitted against each other, with a substantial buffer of douglahs, mulattos and other intricately intermixed races, and a more or less detached class of economically powerful Caucasians, Syrian-Lebanese, Chinese and Indian business people who, whatever their internal ethnic quarrels may be, understand the necessity of reconciling old money with new in the mutual interest of class dominance.

The quest for political dominance is a quest to control the decision-making process in the interest of what really matters: economic self-entrenchment on the basis of class if necessary, and/or ethnicity if possible. But since Afro-Creoles and Indo-Creoles are almost equally balanced in terms of electoral strength both groups secretly recognize the need for a rhetoric of national unity and nation building that might attract support from the alienated centre. Hence the oscillation of both major parties between ethnocentric and nationalistic rhetoric, depending on whether they are in opposition or in power.

Calypsonians and other social commentators in this period of flux and transition have needed to come to terms with the great fluidity of values, loyalties and ideological positions manifest, for example, in the phenomenon of "froghopping" – that is, the crossing back and forth of individuals from one political party to another. The politics that amazes Cro Cro, say, in "Look How Man Does Change" (1998) (also called "It's Amazing How People Change") and bewilders Chalkdust in "Too Much Parties" (1998) is a politics of uncommitment, a politics of pure pragmatism, the domain of trickster and opportunist.

What, then, does one demand of the calypsonian in this time of tension between the death of one cycle and the birth of another? What one should demand of every other category of public commentator – the journalist in print or electronic media; the

writer of letters to the editor; the member of Parliament, whether speaking under the protection of parliamentary privilege or outside of Parliament; the pundit, the preacher, the prelate pontificating from various pulpits; the politician at the hustings; the caller into radio discussion programmes and the omnipotent hosts of such programmes; the cartoonist; the comedian; the satirist. One demands or should demand

- the courage to state convictions based on verified fact;
- the moral consistency to practise what they preach and to live by the values and standards that they seek to impose on others;
- balance born of the recognition that one's viewpoint may have only partial validity;
- fairness and a democratic spirit that allows the Other – however one defines the Other – the same right to discourse, dissent and dialogue;
- the ability to accept picong, censure, the reductive laughter of the Other in the same spirit of give-and-take of gaiety, of elation and of play as one delivers picong, censure and laughter at other people's doorsteps; and
- a genuine and honest seriousness of social concern.

These qualities – courage of conviction, consistency, balance, fairness, recognition of the Other's right to discourse, a spirit of give-and-take, gaiety and honest social concern – will, if we are sufficiently mature, tolerant and lucky, eventually emerge out of the very process of contestation in which Trinidadians and Tobagonians have been historically engaged. One cannot legislate these qualities, particularly when the would-be legislators display a consistent lack of the very values and standards that they seek to impose on the rest of the population. The society at large recognizes such hypocrisy immediately, and calypsonians focus the power of society's laughter on both the hypocrites and their hypocrisy. The state now seeks to legislate against such laughter, to lock up picong. Caught up in the old colonial masquerade of autocracy, the state has regressed to anachronistic nineteenth- and early twentieth-century class legislation. Equally caught up in the ancient masquerade of resistance, the calypsonian will continue to serve as the channel for people's scepticism, laughter and freedom. Finally, it is the masquerade that plays the masquerader.