7
Trinidadian cosmology and values

In this chapter we look at how postings on social media help us to understand the wider values expressed by and through Trinidadian society. One of the questions we posed when starting this project was whether an examination of visual posts, such as photos and memes, could provide the sort of insights into a society that one would gain from a more conventional ethnography. As it happens Miller had previously carried out just such an ethnography, published as the book *Modernity: An Ethnographic Approach*. In that book he argued that it was possible to discern core values within Trinidadian society which took the form of a dualistic logic that expressed certain contradictions of modernity. He called these two sets of values ‘transience’ and ‘transcendence’.

Transience encapsulates the values of the present, of immediacy and the life of the street. Partly as the result of a history of slavery and indentured labour, Trinidadians put considerable emphasis upon values that express their sense of freedom. Rather than a person being defined through longer-term institutionalisation, or being placed within a hierarchy, people want to be judged by that which they create for themselves, including their own appearance. This can also take the form of strong, overt (and sometimes explicit) sexuality, a sense of performance and bravado that used to be called ‘boldface’ and an identity that is judged by appearance. This is a world centred upon the street and reputation; since it is not institutionalised it must be attested to by others, for which social media provides the ideal platform. These values are brought to the fore by the festival of Carnival.

By contrast, Miller argues, the same ruptures of slavery and indentured labour led people to construct the values of transcendence, which focus upon creating long-term family projects involving creating roots and a sense of tradition. This ethos is characterised by education, religion, morality and domesticity. The values of transcendence are most
fully expressed in the festival of Christmas, where the home and family are the key sites of celebration – even for non-Christian Trinidadians.

So slavery and indentured labour led to the development of these two contrasting constellations of value, manifesting the desire for freedom on the one hand and for roots on the other. This development of two antithetical poles is in stark contrast to The Glades, where society has been shaped by a very different history of gradual change over centuries. As shown in Chapter 6, the emphasis in The Glades is upon the middle ground as expressed in the values of the suburban compromise, by not wanting to stand out and by avoiding extremes.

Visibility and the visual

While social media generally leads to an increased emphasis upon visual communication, it has quite different ramifications in these two field sites. In Trinidad there was already an emphasis upon appearance as something that people cultivate. Since appearance is the result of a person’s own actions it is seen as the ‘truth’ about who they are – and being on the surface, rather than being hidden, it is open to inspection by other people. By contrast, for people in The Glades, as reflected in the history of European thought, the surface is often derided as the merely superficial. ² For adults, the truth of a person is felt to be deep inside them. On the outside we see a less authentic self: the surface is shallow, superficial and not to be depended upon. These notions of the self seem to stem from a society that was traditionally hierarchical and institution- alised; a person’s ‘truth’ was assured by their blood or background. ³ For Trinidadians, by contrast, what was deep inside was hidden from view and therefore probably a lie. ⁴

If people are defined more by appearance in Trinidad, then the visual postings found on Facebook might be expected to be seen as a closer reflection of who a person really is and so to have a greater resonance. We have argued along similar lines in previous publications such as Tales From Facebook and Webcam.⁵ People in El Mirador do generally post more images. Appendix Figure 1 shows an average of 732 per person, as compared to an average of 450 images each in The Glades. However, as argued in these previous books, there are many complex elements to this concern with visibility.

In Trinidad Facebook is not only a space for visibility. It becomes a space for the expression of the two opposed forms of values termed transience and transcendence – both of which can take this potential for
visibility to much greater lengths than we would expect in the kind of compromised middle ground favoured in The Glades. In this chapter we shall see many examples of this possibility, for instance when ordinary adornment and consumption develops into the more extreme forms of ‘bling’ culture, or when representations concerned with morality and sexuality extend to images that are clearly intended to shock and outrage and that cannot be ignored. Visual spectacle also has a long history in Trinidadian bio-politics, where the body is used as a site of resistance in social and political movements, riots and protests. Carnival is the most obvious example, as the festival born out of a spirit of resistance by enslaved Africans and enacted by the body through performance.

**Carnival and the values of transience**

Fortunately this rather abstract argument is given very concrete form in Trinidad through the two dominant festivals of Christmas and Carnival. Even more conveniently, there is an obvious transitional moment during New Year’s Eve, locally called Old Year’s Night. This starts out as the most important church service of the year as the closure to the Christmas period, but the night ends in one of the most important parties of the year, the start of the Carnival period. For the next six to eight weeks leading up to Carnival Monday and Tuesday, public life is dominated by a whole series of pre-Carnival parties called fetes.

Women tend to dominate Carnival itself and are much more likely to ‘play mas’ (play masquerade, or parade) in costume. Both men and women go to the pre-Carnival fetes, however – usually outdoor parties held all over the country. These vary from expensive, all-inclusive fetes which attract more elite groups to other ‘bring your own drinks in a cooler’ fetes which are open to anyone.

Fetes are mainly advertised and their tickets sold through the event pages on Facebook, where the organising committee give out their phone numbers to be contacted for buying tickets. Having purchased such tickets, people often show them on their timeline (Figs 7.1 and 7.2).

A good deal of time and attention is invested in the outfits people wear for fetes, and there are a lot of ‘pre-going out’ photos posted on Facebook (Figs 7.3 and 7.4).

Yet when people are at fetes, they prefer to be spotted and have photos taken of them by others. This has led to the rise of businesses based on photographing people at fetes specifically to post on their social photography website and on Facebook, enabling people to tag themselves
or their friends (Figs 7.5, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8). This represents an updated and more democratic version of traditional society pages in newspapers or magazines, but these social media photo businesses can be hired for any event by promoters or event organisers. Such companies are hired for

Tickets to fetes leading up to Carnival are exciting purchases and are often posted for others to admire.

‘Pre-going out’ photos of outfits worn to Carnival fetes are frequently posted on Facebook for comment and display.
for every large social event, with smaller businesses or individuals being hired for local bar events. So when young people go to fetes and events, they can expect to be photographed. In a society where appearance and visibility is so important, this also ensures the images that are circulated are from those occasions when they have spent most attention to style and clothing. But equally important is the public space itself: where one is seen, not just what one is seen in.

Even more expensive are costumes that are purchased for wearing on Carnival Tuesday. Masquerade bands mostly advertise their
costumes through their band website and Facebook pages. Whether young women play mas (parade) themselves or not, many Trinidadians on Facebook ‘like’ these pages in order to look at costumes. The bigger bands have high quality professional photographs with professional models (Fig. 7.9).

El Mirador has its own mas camp⁹ and carnival band with its own Facebook page to advertise costumes. Those created by the El Mirador mas camp are bold and dramatic (Figs 7.10 and 7.11). In this case the models for costumes are usually friends of the designers, or people who have themselves helped with making the costumes; they also share their modelling photos on their own pages.

The masqueraders subsequently post their own range of much less formal photographs showing themselves wearing the costumes on Carnival Monday and Tuesday; the photos are taken by other people who played mas with the band (Figs 7.12, 7.13 and 7.14).

People post fewer photos of actually playing mas (parading) because at that point they just want to concentrate on having a good time. So more photos are taken while they wait in the parade or snatch a quick break earlier in the day (Figs 7.15 and 7.16). Carnival photos are
more of people posed and smiling than they are of dancing and partying; the latter appear more in images of the pre-Carnival fêtes.

The lead up to Carnival also includes competitions for Junior Queens similar to beauty pageants for teenagers. Carnival is in fact just the tip of an iceberg of events and pageants in which people become

Posing and smiling for Carnival photographs helps to pass the time while waiting in the parade or taking a break
used to creating images that are glamorous, styled and posed (Figs 7.17 and 7.18). This lies behind the phenomenon of the ‘faux model’ shot discussed in Chapter 3 which resonates throughout the year and is far more common here than in The Glades.

The dance style seen as iconic of the Carnival season is ‘winning’: typically a man standing behind a woman, gyrating their hips together, though it is also entirely acceptable for women to wine on other women, especially as they far outnumber men at Carnival. At fetes the dance is more performative and provocative, including poses that mimic sex. There is an etiquette around photographing friends ‘getting on bad’ or showing their ‘worst behaviour’ – activities that mark what should happen for a fete to be deemed a success. At other times of the year, such photos wouldn’t be taken and displayed. Yet Carnival is intentionally transgressive – here it is not only encouraged to ‘free up’ or ‘play oneself’, but it’s also acceptable to take these kinds of photos and display them (Figs 7.19 and 7.20).

Nevertheless, friends may still be mostly discreet when taking photos of winning. Photos often only reveal the backs of heads or behinds and, unless people are in full masquerade costumes, we do not see many faces clearly. As a transgressive festival, Carnival can be a time when people can dispense with hierarchies and formalities. You can post photos of your boss winning and ‘getting on bad’, for example, showing that

In Junior Queens events, similar to beauty pageants, teenage girls learn to style themselves and pose.
they too are capable of letting their hair down and getting into the spirit of Carnival fetes.

Carnival is the festival that most explicitly foregrounds transience, but the term refers to a far wider set of values found throughout the year. As a result, visual posts from Trinidad show more emphasis generally on glamour and sexuality than would be found in The Glades, and also the appropriation of style associated with forms of street culture such as hip-hop or gangsta aesthetics. Although Carnival is considered the time of year to ‘play yourself’, the idea that it is through the construction of the external self that a person reveals the truth about who they are is consistent.

As a result, the Facebook profiles of adults in El Mirador include more images of people going out for the night at any time of the year. Taking photos with friends in different venues, for example posed together in front of a bar or at a club, emphasises both looks and sociality (Figs 7.21, 7.22 and 7.23).

The Trinidadian term ‘liming’ is used in a similar way to ‘hanging out’ in other countries, but in Trinidad it is considered the core to social life. For the previous generation, liming would be more of a male activity, belonging to the world of the street: men limed in rum shops, discussed politics or other issues in a highly performative way and talked to, or about, the women who passed by. Today men and women lime together or in single-sex groups, but it retains certain key characteristics. Liming may start at one person’s house, then without any fixed plan gather in others, or move on to a bar or club. At a weekend a group might get together and go to a beach or river, where people would cook or bring food. Drinking is considered central to most liming, but people also enjoy it for the sake of being together and enjoying sociality in a relaxed fashion, ideally with no time constraints.
It is this sense of spontaneity and of not knowing what might happen next that brings out the element of freedom associated with transience. People then post images which try to capture something of these values. Typically such photos show people having fun or drinking, but they also pay some attention to how stylish their outfits are and how good they look (Figs 7.24, 7.25, 7.26 and 7.27).

As with Carnival, the orientation is to reclaiming the street and public space, putting oneself and one’s body on show with no restriction of movement or behaviour. The modes of talk appropriate to the lime, banter and wit, are again highly performative, accentuating this ideal of putting oneself out for public display and validation. For all these reasons, posting images on Facebook feels like a natural extension of these prior modes of performative visibility (Figs 7.28, 7.29 and 7.30).

The logic of transience around performance and drawing attention to oneself extends to eye-catching accessories, such as elaborate nails for women or watches and jewellery for men. There comes a point at which these develop forms which are spectacular and difficult to ignore. This may be as true of the culture of appearance itself as the ‘bling’ phenomenon, replete with things that shine and sparkle: they are
Liming means going out and having a good time, ideally without time constraints. In celebrating spontenaiity and freedom, it is associated with the values of transience and physicality and the body, and not restricting behaviour.
worn precisely to draw attention. This aesthetic may also be extended, as we shall see, to visual postings that are extreme in their own right, featuring deliberately shocking, repulsive or sexually explicit content. Almost every aspect of this logic runs counter to that of The Glades, where almost as much effort may be expended in not standing out or drawing attention to oneself.

As such, ‘bling’ may be the result of careful, considered crafting of one’s appearance. Make-up, hair and ‘going out’ nails all lend themselves to such styling (Figs 7.31, 7.32 and 7.33).

When nails are done at home, they might show one or two colours and some simple patterning. Those done in a salon, however, reveal their full potential as accessories, striking for their elaborate patterns and designs. Long, artificial nails are added, colours are bold and bright, and patterns can be extravagant with glitter, several colours and stick-on jewels (Fig. 7.34). Photos of nails are mostly close up, showing one hand either flat and horizontal or with the palm facing up and fingers curled inwards. The images are often posted by women who work in the salons themselves, if they are particularly proud of the day’s creations, or by satisfied customers, who would then tag the nail technician or the salon. Similarly hairstyles are often posted after they have been especially done for a wedding or other occasion, as noted in Chapter 5.

Posting around ‘bling’ is especially common for men and women of lower-middle class and lower incomes, although the appropriation of
‘bling’ culture is also used by those who own businesses such as bars or work in fashion, where business is related to reputation and street culture. If women emphasise make-up and nails, the equivalent for men is ‘metal’ – especially gold, for which see the comments recorded in Chapter 8 (Figs 7.35, 7.36, 7.37, 7.38 and 7.39).

It seems that this bling aesthetic that pertains to the body finds new modes of expression when we explore how people draw attention to themselves through visual images posted on Facebook. For example, we find images clearly intended to be scandalous, horrific or overtly sexual – images that we felt could not be shown here. The content of these is in some ways resonant with another part of Carnival culture, that of *jouvert*, the opening masquerade, where people party in the middle of the night and into the sunrise of Carnival Monday morning. Historically people masqueraded in *jouvert* as creatures of the night, as devils or covered in mud, as well as figures

For men, ‘bling’ also includes displays of metal, in particular gold

Sharing images of elaborate nail designs taken from other sources is also common
relating to scandal and gossip about politicians, for example. The sunrise would expose these hidden things of the night, bringing them into the light of day. The logics of revelation and exposure are also in the vocabulary of *bacchanal*, the confusion which results from gossip and scandal. Trinidadians often seem to view bacchanal as the quintessential moment of Trinidian culture.\(^\text{10}\)

This tendency to reach out towards the extremes also applies to sexuality itself, where the more extreme and explicit images could be considered a sort of ‘bling’ sex. They are not common in El Mirador, but they are present, mostly posted by young men and discussed while sitting and drinking in bars. The idea of sex as a cause of ‘bacchanal’ may explain why we came across instances of what is now called ‘revenge porn’ in Trinidad, including a website dedicated to such images, some years before it was reported in the UK. Some Trinidadians were far more prepared to make the victim’s identity clear when they publicly displayed sexual images from when they had been partners to these girls. Given the small size of Trinidad, this was more likely to lead to public humiliation and shame. Although mainly found on dedicated sites such as Triniporn, such images were also occasionally posted directly on to Facebook (Figs 7.40 and 7.41).

Sex photos were by no means the only genre that could be used to create shock or spectacle. During Sinanan’s 15-month ethnography in El Mirador, there were at least three incidents where videos of schoolgirls...
fighting went viral on Facebook. These were shared in the thousands, as were films of parents giving their children ‘licks’, a form of corporal punishment (Figs 7.42 and 7.43).

We are not suggesting that social media is the cause of such a phenomenon. Clear precedents can be found in the local newspaper industry, where images that attract a reaction of repulsion or disgust as a spectacle remain a common feature of their front pages and are clearly intended to cause outrage. For decades Trinidadians have been buying national newspapers with titles such as ‘The Bomb’, ‘The Punch’, ‘The Heat’ and so forth, which mix naked and semi-pornographic images of young Trinidadian women with images designed to titillate and shock taken from international media created for the same purpose, such as the US National Enquirer. Trinidadian news programmes and newspapers report violent crimes regularly, and the shares that are circulated on Facebook are often an extension of the sensationalism we see in the news, though they may sometimes be even more graphic in nature (Figs 7.44 and 7.45).

The values of transcendence

The study of visual Facebook posts here follows the logic of an earlier monograph by Miller, in which it was argued that these values of transience are created simultaneously with an entirely contrasting set of values expressing the concept of transcendence. Where transience finds its most explicit form in Carnival, the values of family, decency, education,
religion and putting down roots associated with transcendence are celebrated through the festival of Christmas.

Christmas

Just as Carnival is much bigger than the event itself because a whole season of activities leads up to it, the same is true of Christmas in Trinidad. There are many postings on Facebook in the months leading up to Christmas concerning shopping, work parties and celebrations. The home is the focus of Christmas and the event involves a yearly ritual of cleaning and repainting, putting up new curtains and mounting an array of special Christmas decorations, including the tree. All of these may be the subject of Facebook postings (Figs 7.46 and 7.47).

Christmas is associated with both the family and the extended family as well as the wider community. At this time of year young people are also more likely to be more active in their communities, either by helping relatives, being involved in school events or undertaking more philanthropic work, for instance donating and contributing to Christmas hampers (Figs 7.48, 7.49 and 7.50).

Christmas is also a time that memorialises ancestors, and may supplement the anniversary of a death as a time to remember a loved one (Figs 7.51, 7.52 and 7.53). More generally, it is used to celebrate traditions.
Volunteering in the community or taking photos with family with Christmas decorations in homes or public spaces are fairly common.

Christmas in Trinidad celebrates family, tradition and establishing roots.

Christmas can also be a time to commemorate the passing of loved ones.
Religion and nationalism

This is a period in which people make their religious beliefs explicit on Facebook, often through relevant memes. In Appendix Figure 1, seven out of 50 participants posted a total of 21 religious-themed posts in their 20 most recent posts, whereas only two people in The Glades posted religious images. Indeed, for some Trinidadians, religion is the dominant theme of posts on their Facebook timeline throughout the year. Trinidadians can be religious at all ages, but a common trajectory is to return to religious devotion around the time when one has a house of one’s own and children (Figs 7.54, 7.55, 7.56 and 7.57).

Religious posting is found in relation to both Hinduism and Islam, although rarely as emphatic as with the Christian Evangelical churches who ‘spread the word’ through constantly posting images that they hope will inspire their followers (Figs 7.58, 7.59 and 7.60).

Trinidad is unusually ecumenical: everyone celebrates Christmas, Eid and Diwali. Indo-Trinidadians may post religious memes celebrating all three festivals. The ‘likes’ that religious posts and memes attract are more related to the sentiment of the post than the religion it belongs to, something people confirmed in discussion. However, sharing behaviour was different to ‘liking’, as people would only share posts and memes from their own religion.

Religion is a dominant theme of Facebook posts throughout the year.
Pentecostalism and Evangelism are associated with more didactic religious posts, but these often use images taken from popular culture to help make their point. There is something of an upsurge in the posting of such images at the time of Carnival as a kind of ‘warding off’ of the evil spirits associated with that festival (see Chapter 8).

More generally, however, people express the wider values of transcendence by linking both religious practice and ethnicity within a general, family-oriented ethos, sharing photos of family or vocational events (Figs 7.61, 7.62 and 7.63).

Serious informational posting and postings related to education would come within this frame, though these seem less common than in the English field site (Fig. 7.64).

By contrast, there is far more emphasis in Trinidad on nationalism, which is taken very seriously as ritual: all formal events are preceded by standing for the national anthem. It is common to find on Facebook memes associated with such nationalism, with a higher instance around national holidays such as Emancipation Day or
Independence Day. At international events such as conferences, club or sporting events, people may also express nationalism visually through décor and dress, for example wearing the national colours (Figs 7.65, 7.66, 7.67 and 7.68).

The values of transcendence seem to impact on the role of humour within El Mirador as compared to The Glades. Certainly banter, wit and other forms of humour are commonly used to diffuse situations, especially in small towns such as El Mirador, where families and friends have lived among their peers for decades and where grievances could have accumulated between people. They are also integral to transience, where they become performative and an aspect of visibility. But in The
Glades humour is found on Facebook commonly directed towards issues that might otherwise be seen as serious, including religion and nationalism. In Trinidad, by contrast, values associated with transcendence such as religion, nationalism and the family are seen as serious issues; they are much more rarely subject to humour. There is, however, also a notion of a specifically ‘Trini’ humour that people assume those from outside Trinidad would not ‘get’ (Figs 7.69 and 7.70).

**Vocational interests**

A key factor that helps transcendence coalesce into a consistent set of values in Trinidad that is again very different from The Glades is the treatment of work. This topic is central to Facebook in El Mirador and largely absent from Facebook in The Glades. One can see the continuity with posting on themes such as religion, in that for some the attitude to entrepreneurial activity seems to include an almost evangelical
component, being promulgated as though it constitutes a life purpose (Fig. 7.71). There are no less than 20 places of religious and of entrepreneurial ‘worship’ in El Mirador, and each has its own dedicated following. Here we will examine two: a church named Faith Community and a network of Amway distributors.

Faith Community was established by a pastor and his wife who moved to the States to train as missionaries in the early 2000s and then returned to spread their message to the communities where they grew up. The congregation is less than five years old; it has a following of around 100, including several aged under 20 who are avid users of social media (Fig. 7.72).

‘Trini’ humour is also quite common, as in the memes which make fun of ‘Trini’ mothering (‘mudda’) and a parody of the ‘Keep Calm’ meme which asks: ‘I’m a Trini, what the arse is calm?’

Vocational projects are also invested with a sense of life purpose. A religious post from a member of Faith Community Church.
The Pastor of the church was a strong advocate for using Facebook to spread the church’s message. He would also post messages and blessings for Easter and Christmas and throughout the year, although he has also found Facebook somewhat distracting and intrusive, taking up his time in sifting through postings to find material relevant to the church and its ministry. Similarly his wife would post photos of church events around Christmas and games days, as well as family holidays. The couple experienced a negative backlash around this visibility of their family life, which became the subject of jealousy, and they have since deactivated their Facebook accounts.

However, members in the youth group have continued to post around their family, friends and beliefs to reinforce visibly the nature of community to the church. The youth ministry also post events such as church camps or sports days on Facebook and share Bible verses and religious or inspirational memes on their timelines.

Amway, ‘American Way’, is a US-based company that manufactures household items sold through personal networking or multi-level marketing rather than stores. Individuals buy their own franchise, but are given constant incentives by the company to build up a network of distributors to increase their own profit. This creates a hierarchy in which managing other people as distributors provides greater rewards than selling the goods oneself.

At an Amway meeting, the atmosphere resembles that of charismatic worship – full of high-energy call and response, played between speakers and intended to generate motivation and enthusiasm. Visibility is a major part of Amway’s rhetoric, with an emphasis upon the display of professionalism and success. Higher ranking individuals need to ‘look the part’ in order to gain trust and authority, with men wearing suits and women wearing tailored skirts, blouses and jackets. Teams may wear the same colours.

Facebook is then considered an extension of the visibility afforded by meetings. For example, a very successful young couple post images that show them at conferences and events, speaking in public and meeting with other successful partners in the US. While the husband posts more motivational quotes and memes that focus on individual hard work and success, the young wife posts around their baby and family, emphasising their well-rounded family life (Figs 7.73, 7.74, 7.75 and 7.76).

Another woman posts motivational memes when she is stuck in traffic or comes home in the evening to show that she is always thinking about the people with whom she is working and encouraging them from afar (Fig. 7.77). She also uses her Facebook page to advertise some of the
goods such as cosmetics, which fits into a genre of posting around make-up and style in Trinidad (Figs 7.78, 7.79 and 7.80).

The use of Facebook by such groups seems to extend the values enshrined in transcendence, just as bling and scandal extended the values associated with transience. Both the Amway and the Faith communities take advantage of the visual platform of Facebook to create the feel of an imagined community, in Anderson’s sense of a collective that individuals can identify themselves with as part of the group. They attempt to fill in for what they feel the state has failed to provide and, through religion and entrepreneurship, give an alternate means for a group identity where one can achieve individual aspirations as well.

There are many other variants of this form of evangelical entrepreneurship. One we encountered in El Mirador Facebook postings was the sales meetings for an

A motivational meme posted by another Amway Independent Business Owner
expensive version of coffee called Organo Gold. These tended to attract low income people from squatting areas interested in becoming sales representatives, who otherwise might have exemplified the values of transience. As noted in these examples, the religious and entrepreneurial content is often blended with photos of happy, successful couples and memes with serious messages around hard work and perseverance – as well as an emphasis upon family, togetherness and setting down roots for the future.

While these examples represent aspirational motivations, often including people with less education, when we look to people with university degrees we see a greater concern to adopt strategies that are seen as more sophisticated. For example, the Rotaract group in El Mirador are in their twenties and early thirties, the youth wing of the traditional Rotary club found alongside similar philanthropic groups such as Lions and Kiwanis. They all have strong local ties, with local schooling or parents involved in local businesses. Their Facebook postings and shared memes would be closer to those found in The Glades, revealing an increasing emphasis upon more environmentally-conscious and green
issues, both locally and in relation to global concerns such as climate change (Fig. 7.81). However, an effort is made to combine such international messages with more local Trinidadian idioms, such as showing concern for native species (Fig. 7.82).

These middle-class groups are particularly cosmopolitan. Young women look at international fashion blogs and YouTube videos, in many ways reflecting whatever causes such ‘clean-cut’ groups are espousing worldwide. These include the recent development of environmental and outreach work, ranging from beach clean ups to packing hampers to distribute to the poor at Christmas. They also emulate the crafts and baking associated with worldwide trends in the revival of knitting, crocheting and fabric work and cake decorating, and are entirely at one with people in The Glades in their current emphasis within this genre – which is, of course the cup cake (Figs 7.83 and 7.84).

It is important to note that for the Rotaractors, as for almost all Trinidadians, there is an expectation that they will associate themselves with elements of transience as well as transcendence. In addition to frequent photos of a group of them liming, their posts also show traits such as humour, dialect, poses, drinking and sociality, each with their specific Trinidadian inflection. They will espouse the better class of all-inclusive pre-Carnival fetes and hope that photos will then circulate on Facebook showing that they were present (Figs 7.85, 7.86, 7.87 and 7.88).
Other worldwide trends include cupcake decorating.

Rotaractors are community-oriented, but also embrace liming and having a good time.
This is in no way an anomaly. The key to understanding the content of this chapter is to realise that the core difference between El Mirador and The Glades is not just that people in El Mirador espouse the values of transience and transcendence rather than the middle ground of suburban England. It is rather that they espouse both of these simultaneously. Trinidadians want to be both local and global, to have fun and to be religious, and they want to show their affinity to these values at a personal as well as a group level.

**Dualism and bacchanal**

The emphasis in The Glades upon occupying a middle ground of compromise and moderation creates not just a homogeneity of postings, but also an internal consistency in the posts of a given individual. By contrast, in El Mirador, many people exhibit a clear dualism within their own Facebook postings. That is to say the same person may post not only staunchly Christian and moralising memes, but also images of explicit sexuality and scandal – often juxtaposed on the same timeline.

We will present one mild and one more extreme example. Fig. 7.89 shows a young man with his Rotaract peers winning awards and on a field trip, images that show community values. But we also see photos of liming, drinking and having fun, photos that the young man described as showing him ‘as a real person’ (Fig. 7.89).

In the second example we see a more extreme dualism. Here a young man continually posts memes side by side that represent both a strong religiosity and also explicit sexuality (Fig. 7.90). There were many examples of this kind of posting, among women as well as men.

While people do not find it a problem to juxtapose these apparently opposed values, they are entirely aware that visual images as a form of revelation can have consequences. They recognise that Facebook itself encourages a culture of nosiness and gossip that can lead to scandal and bacchanal. Facebook is often known as Macobook, referring to the local term ‘to maco’, which means prying into other people’s business without their consent (Fig. 7.91). It is possible that Facebook has led to people being increasingly conscious and explicit about these effects. Terms such as ‘real talk’ and bacchanal certainly existed prior to Facebook, but the platform provides a new forum for their discussion and dissection. Bacchanal may emerge on Facebook through direct comments on images, for example the caption accompanying this posting which means ‘Miss, I take your man for the entire Carnival week, he says he’s hot for you, see how I’m wining on him, lol’ (Fig. 7.92).
An example of posts of a young man in the Rotaract club that shows both serious and less serious aspects of his vocation.

A more extreme example of dualism which shows strong religiosity and explicit sexuality.

‘Macobook’, a Trinidadian nickname for Facebook, refers to the local term ‘maco’, meaning to look into another person’s business unasked.

Bacchanal appears directly through posts intended to provoke and cause scandal.
Another genre of posts that can lead to bacchanal, but seems to be strongly associated with the rise of social media more generally, is the ‘indirect’. Here an (often emotionally charged) update is posted, but without stating at whom the particular barbed comment is aimed. Examples of indirects from El Mirador include: ‘The more they say, the more I pray’ or ‘Inactions speak louder than actions’ – or the comment on honesty that accompanies this post (Fig. 7.93).

We also see Facebook postings which expose the pretentiousness that Trinidadians consider comes from being too serious about transcendent values. In mid-2014, for instance, a series of memes circulated featuring Kermit the Frog, based on an advertisement for Lipton tea. It portrays Kermit sitting watching chaotic New York City from the inside of a café, sipping calmly a cup of Lipton tea. The catchphrase for the meme, ‘But that’s none of my business’, is used to highlight what another person or group is doing wrong (Figs 7.94 and 7.95). While also found in other societies where these memes circulate, this particular combination of humour, moralising and ‘truth’ is typical of Trinidadian cultural ideals of bacchanal. The memes are, in effect, also a comment on how Facebook itself, and the meme as a genre, can participate in these cultural practices.
Conclusion

We started this chapter by asking whether through the analysis only of visual posts we could reach the same conclusions as a more ‘traditional’ offline ethnography, such as Miller’s book *Modernity: an ethnographic approach* (1994). Of course that was somewhat disingenuous; we have written this chapter in full knowledge of this earlier work and have adopted its terminology for our analysis. But at the very least we can state that it has not been at all hard to analyse this visual material as expressive of the same dualism that was the subject of the earlier study; indeed we would like to think that this would have become evident through our current analysis of visual postings on Facebook even without this precedent. The key point of this volume is that values on social media only really become clear when we see how they contrast with those of another society. Thanks to the visuals posted on Facebook, we actually do ‘see’ these contrasts.

This chapter has affirmed the existence of two clear sets of values, which we have called transience and transcendence. Transience refers to the temporary, the egalitarian, the free, and the world of reputation and the street celebrated in the festival of Carnival. Transcendence describes the desire for roots and permanence, the values developed through continuity of home, family, work, religion and community and most fully expressed by the festival of Christmas.

That this dualism should migrate so easily and clearly to Facebook is hardly surprising when we consider the introduction to this chapter. Here we pointed out the importance of appearance, surfaces and visibility itself in Trinidadians’ core idea of what constitutes the truth of personhood; for them this lies on the surface, subject to the judgement of others, and is not hidden away in their deep interior, the place of lies. Once again this is the exact opposite to the beliefs of people of The Glades, for whom the truth and substance of a person lies deep within; outside is the domain of superficiality and mere appearance, and is viewed as potentially deceptive. This is one of the reasons why adults in The Glades seem almost to stress how little attention they have paid to how they look when their images are posted online. For them there is a concern that Facebook might present a false or more superficial version of their true selves.

In stark contrast, if you ask a Trinidadian to summarise the essence of being Trini in one word, it is quite likely that the word will be bacchanal. As anthropologists, we need to respect and explain that choice.
It seems to follow quite naturally from the juxtaposition of these three facets of Trinidadian cosmology: the idea that the truth of a person lies on the surface, the drive towards visibility, and the set of values that coalesce around transience on the one hand and transcendence on the other. In a context in which visibility makes this juxtaposition obvious, there is a clear potential for subsequent scandal and confusion, which is what the term bacchanal celebrates. But the final point is that this is indeed celebrated rather than denied. It is felt that such visibility, in bringing the truth of a person into the public light, is itself a positive, exposing what might otherwise be falsehood and deception. This is why in *Tales from Facebook* it was clear that in some respects Facebook itself has come to be regarded as the book of Truth.12