

The Cultural and Spiritual Origination of The Western, Southern and Central African Influences of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival and the artform of Kalinda.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I will discuss the origins of Carnival and the artform of Kalinda within the Caribbean twin island of Trinidad and Tobago. I will discuss these practices' cultural and spiritual roots in West, Central and South Africa. The first section of this paper will discuss Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. The explanation regarding the festival will provide an understanding of how, what, where, when, and why it came into existence and will always be significant to the island's cultural and spiritual structural foundation. The second section will explain Kalinda's complete physical and spiritual art form and why it is to understand. The last section of this paper will discuss the significant cultural and spiritual connection between Carnival and Kalinda. It will discuss how this festival and art form are significant to Trinidad and Tobago's spiritual and cultural foundation, hence providing the relevance of it being remembered and carried on.

African influences are predominant throughout the Caribbean—one island, which can be seen in Trinidad and Tobago. While Trinidad and Tobago has a diversity of races and ethnicities that produce its cosmopolitan society, impacting the country's culture, the African influence is the most predominant. Trinidad and Tobago's African

influences are rooted within the regions of West, Central and South Africa. Carnival and Kalinda are entwined with each other as Kalinda is done during the period of Carnival within the period of Trinidad in Tobago (predominantly between the January to February period). This had been traditional within Trinidad in the early nineteenth and

twentieth centuries.

Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival is regarded as 'one of the best examples of strong cultural hybridity between Africans and Europeans' (Miyoshi, Mika "*Representation of African Heritage in Trinidad Carnival*." *Representation of African Heritage in Trinidad Carnival*, January 7th, 2016, pp. 83-93). Carnival is a traditional, annual street festival (known as the 'the greatest festival in the world') in the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain. It is held for two days, always on a Monday or Tuesday as 'Carnival Monday and Carnival Tuesday.' It pays ancestral homage and symbolization African emancipation from slavery in the nineteenth century. Before the forty-day Christian and Catholic Lenten period, these two days fall between January and February. The purpose of this was and is to continue the celebration of the history of emancipation, of African slavery from the European colonization. They were no longer under oppression due to their persistent rebellion. Two significant historical, events that have to be understood that contributed to the product of Carnival were the emancipation of slavery in 1838 and the 'Canboulay Riot of 1881' (Guzda, John. *The Canboulay Riot 1881: Influence of Free Blacks on Trinidad's Carnival*. January 11th, 2012, pp. 1-10).

An estimated 44,002 Africans of the six million from Africa, were brought to Trinidad and Tobago through the 'Middle Passage' (the journey to the Caribbean and other parts of the New World at this time) via slavery from the Transatlantic Slave Trade to work on the plantations owned by Europeans, from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, "Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY." *Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY*). The most severe method used on Africans was the abolition of their physical and spiritual connection to Africa, in addition to the strict control and punishment methods such as castration, branding with hot irons, dismembering and locking in prisons and dungeons ("Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY." *Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY*, p1). The agenda behind this principle was dispersing the same ethnic groups to various plantations to prevent the groups from creating an uprising. Communication that was now to be eradicated was one of the most

important things to be destroyed here. A significance of this was the banning of African drums and rituals due to enslavers' fears that they would be able to communicate physically and spiritually amongst themselves. This led them to practice their religion underground simultaneously and the religious faith of the enslaver, who imposed Christianity as the only acceptable form of worship upon them. This was a form of manipulation by the Africans, and they 'consciously erected a parallel interpretation of the Christian structure of saints such that when they publicly prayed to them, their inner minds/heads (*ori-inu*), which the African regards to be by far more powerful than the actual head, in spiritual matters, was praying to the equivalent Orisa' (AIYEJINA, FUNSO, and RAWLE GIBBONS. "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 4, 1999, pp. 42). This, however, was not going to last forever due to emancipation.

In 1783 European (British and French) Catholic enslavers would have their masquerade balls in the pre-Lenten season, with enslaved people only having servant roles. They would do so using clothing, accessories and makeup. Africans, who had their own culture inclusive of dress wear, music, drumming, dancing and singing, combined this with the mocking of their European superiors, producing a variety of characters paraded even up until today. The enslaved Africans were from the West, Central and South regions and were brought to Trinidad. They were the Yoruba (the predominant West), Koongo-Angola (modernly spelt Congo - Central, Angola - South,) and Hausa (Northern Nigeria). The Yoruba, the predominant African group, was and still is a major influence within the Carnival in addition to the English, French and Spanish influences. These people's combination of religion and spirituality were and are very critical to Carnival as it is a major component in Carnival's spiritual purpose - ancestral veneration of those who paved the way for emancipation. The ancestral veneration consists of two essential aspects: the combined religious-spiritual belief of Orisha and their regional costume portrayal.

The Yoruba tradition of Orisha is one of the 'most prominent,' 'contemporary African religious traditions' had and is still noted as one of the most prominent brought to

Trinidad. (AIYEJINA, FUNSO, and RAWLE GIBBONS. "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad. "Caribbean Quarterly, vol. 45, no. 4, 1999, pp. 35) The Orisa tradition was named Sango, after Sango, the God of thunder and lightning and the 'titular/patron deity of Oyo' (where post-Emancipation Yoruba captives came from). This was because he had the most meaningful and prominent influence on this African religion. He was known to possess 'protector' and 'avenger' qualities, leading to the belief that he was impressionable to the oppressed and enslaved. Trinidadian novelist, playwright, journalist and writer Earl Lovelace shows the reference to this in *The Dragon Can't Dance*: 'sweeping yards in a ritual, heralding the masquerader's coming, that goes back centuries for its beginnings, back across the Middle Passage, back to Mali and to Guinea and Dahomey and Congo, back to Africa when Maskers were sacred and revered'(Lovelace, 1979: 120). AIYEJINA, FUNSO, and RAWLE GIBBONS. "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad. "Caribbean Quarterly, vol. 45, no. 4, 1999, p 41).

The Orisa faith survived due to the Oyo-Yoruba Africans (captives from wars between Yoruba subgroups sold into slavery) who had been brought to their new home, the New World in the Caribbean and South America. The principal places were Cuba, Brazil and Trinidad via the Atlantic Slave Trade (eighteenth and nineteenth century). This is the reason why the faith has survived up to the present. Even though it has not been consistently recorded via documentation from then to now, Trinidadians of African descent have been able to continue practicing this Yoruba-originated legacy. This is done through generations remembering what they have learnt through ancestry passing this tradition down to second and third generations.

The costumes are significant to the homage and, therefore, the pioneer designers of the culture. Many prominent and influential pioneers have laid the foundation for Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. They are Harold Saldenah, Peter Minshell, Brian Mac Farlane, Carlisle Chang, George Bailey, Stephen Lee Chung, and Norris Eustace. Norris Eustace and Harold Saldenah were two legends who made their mark within the roots of this Carnival tradition. Norris Eustace was the designer for the great Harold Saldenah.

This period would have been around the late 1950s to the early '60s, the emergence of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. His nephew Curtis Eustace, the national record holder for the most 'King of Carnival' titles in Trinidad and Tobago, continues today's tradition.

Through the diversity of designs created for all those participating in the festival to enjoy, these pioneered carnival designers shared the common factor from past to present - carrying on the importance of 'mas' - the concept of costume worn to celebrate African diversity as well as other ethnicities who also became emancipated. After years of revolts and rebellions from Africans, On June 18th, 1837, at St Joseph, Donald Stewart, known as 'Dagaa,' former African chief in Guinea and the leader of the first British West India Regiment, led a revolt. This led to him and his remaining crew being sentenced to death on August 16th, 1837 and the following year on August 1st, 1834; the British Parliament passed 'The Act of the Abolition of Slavery' on August 28th, 1833 ("Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY." *Emancipation - SOLD INTO SLAVERY*, pp 5-7).

'Canboulay' (spelled initially as 'cannes bru lees') was the act of sugarcane fields being burnt. Burning the crops was a rebellious revolt done to the elite European enslavers for liberty and to sabotage their enslaver's economy. This was because it was produced by free slave labour. The enslaved people showcased how they were anticolonial and anti-catholic, taking a pro-African stance in emancipating and celebrating this. This led to an important historical event of canboulay that marked the start of the festivity, 'Canboulay Act in 1881'. This was when the British administration decided to out rule and permanently suppress annual African celebrations in the capital city's streets by using police restraint and force. Revolting and protesting were in the streets for African freedom. After years of struggle, even after slavery had been abolished to receive freedom, in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago had become colonial rule abolished and no longer under the British regime. Through this freedom, they immediately did not hesitate to celebrate on the streets. It is from this point on to now that Carnival is celebrated in the history of emancipation and struggle (Elder, J.D. "Cannes Brûlées." TDR (1988-), vol. 42, no. 3,

1998, pp. 38-43).

Kalinda is the traditional art form of stick fighting practiced within Trinidad and Tobago's carnival period, predominantly by males. This prospectus will explain the simultaneous cultural and spiritual roots of these practices of African slaves of the Yoruba, traditionally continued in Trinidad and Tobago under European colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The word is comprised of two words with two meanings combined. 'Ka' is a southern Koongo and Mbundu 'nominal diminutive prefix,' similarly in French Creole languages. It meant drum (Hearn 1890, 143) hence why it can be linked to being used as a call out by the fighters to encourage drummers to play louder, to hype them up for the match; they would say, "give me keg/ka" (Pearse 1955, Envelope 4, 8.22). This practice arrived in Trinidad in the nineteenth century with these enslaved Africans. Eventually, it became part of the plantation creole culture. It was highly noticeable within Central Africa. This was predominantly, originally and culturally practiced as a pastime by Central and South Africans, continued by second and third-generation descendants. These descendants were of Koongo-Angolan ancestry. It was also used as a form of self-defence, particularly by those who would have been considered professionally trained soldiers 'specially trained for war' (Thornton 1988b, 362) with the stick. In addition to this, being able to display skills that "included a facility in hand-to-hand combat with sword, club, battle axe, and stabbing spear, and in some cases use as a shield . . . Thus the important skill was, above all, the ability to twist, leap, and dodge to avoid arrows or the blows of opponents" (pp. 363-64). Evidence is seen as the Koongo and Ngdongo is connected to the war drills of the Haitian Musundi battle dance.

There were many ways to open a fight. One way it commenced was for a player "to run in a mystic circle ."This was done to 'close off emanations of jealousy and envy' (Thompson 1991,7). A second was called the 'parade .'There was a time limit of three to four hours in the afternoon consisting of various contestants in the ring called a gayal. There were holes prepared near it so that a fighter had a headrest to rest his head so that blood would have been able to be drained out over the hole. This Congo poses signified 'the presence of the spirit' and 'ecstasy'

sharing similarity to what is known by the Koongo as 'yaangalala .'This is when the hands are thrust above the head with fingers spread wide. It was done with his "left arm akimbo and the right hand up and forwards ."This was an 'opening pose' in that players could strike their opponents by throwing power against them to increase their chances of strength to win. Women sometimes pose similarly to their male counterparts with the left hand on the hip, and the right held 'poised in the air' (Courlander 1960, 131).

The stick is called 'bois,' a French for wood made from the following fruit trees - yellow poui, sour guava, gasparee and anaree. It was believed that the saplings of these trees should be cut 'when the moon is weak and the nights are dark .'It is the most significant asset to the fighter himself, hence why much preparation went into it for a bloody win. It ranged from five to six feet in length with a diameter of about seven-eighths of an inch. The stick fighters were called 'Meyers' (Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *Central African in the Caribbean - Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures - Chapter 8 'Accessing Power: Ritual War and Masquerade 209'*).

They were generally believed to have had their mothers put snake poison on their sticks, wiping it with a red cloth. They ensured the sticks were spiritually guarded as they were believed to have 'power .'It is said to be the 'guarded stick' that as soon as you hit your opponent 'a lash, bam their stick burst in half' as deemed in the Trinidadian creole colloquial language (meaning in English layman's terms, the stick would break). This was also regarded by the French term 'bon rai' or bonne raise' - 'a good strike .'It rested on the thumb and the little finger, claspng it with three middle fingers. The spiritual and physical were entwined as serious preparation (Pearse 1955, Envelope 4).

Music played a huge role. It consisted of connoisseurs and percussion. The person was accompanied by the music of short lengths of bamboo or 'spoons against bottles' or drums. These tones and rhythms were said to forewarn competitors of two things: to instruct them by hinting to him something wrong with his strategy or how to take advantage of the enemy's weakness (Hill 1972, 26). Being

stuck to the head was considered the worst type of blow for a player to receive.

In southwestern Nigeria and Trinidad, drums are accompanied by 'gourd rattles and hand clapping'. Two instruments used by Trinidadian Shangoists who would have been involved in the musical aspect of Kalinda are the shagby and a long slender calabash. The shagby is an instrument of equivalence to the shekere rattle in Nigeria, made from a large round calabash whose top has been replaced with a piece of goatskin' (Simpson, George Eaton. "The Shango Cult in Nigeria and in Trinidad." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 64, no. 6, 1962, pp. 1208. JSTOR, Accessed March 2nd, 2020). The long slender calabash contained a string of buttons that produced a high sound volume when shaken. The 'chantwells' (in French chauntuelles or chanelles in chantuer), known as the male singers, would sing lyrics to motivate the opponents, with the male drumming simultaneously playing a role in the big drum tradition. (Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *Central African in the Caribbean - Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures - Chapter 8 'Accessing Power: Ritual War and Masquerade pp. 199-206'*).

The songs used in the act of Kalinda were Yoruba sacred melodies which developed into a genre of music called "Trinidad Yoruba." These songs had African religious chants that were sacred. These songs stemmed from the worship of Shango among the Yoruba. Shango was the deity of thunder and lightning. These songs were sung as personal boasting in ritual battles and revolting against the oppressors during 'canboulay or burning of the sugarcane fields.' It was a known prelude routine to burning crops by free labourers or enslaved people to sabotage the enslaver's economy. These boasts were 'Ó rú ogúnná gbòngbò' ('He carried aloft a huge flambeau' - a flame is lit) and 'Ó fi íréké pán' ('He set the canes alight'). A common chant was 'Zingaytalala'. It was an old-folk chant traditionally sung in the gayelle, rarely used now. It is described as "A cry from deep from within, an old stickman chant, a reckoning. It is a cry from the spirit, a shout from the soul, a cry for healing, a call to the world to do more and be more, for the good of the whole" (Espinet, Rachel. "3canal To 'Boom up History' with Zingaytalala." *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, February 15th, 2019).

In conclusion, these two practices remind Trinidadians of the freedom they enslaved africans yearned. The execution in both has remained at present except for Kalinda, being practiced as a culturally African-based sport and remembering the artform's tradition. While it is not used for war-based reasons, the elders who have passed on his art form up to current will use it as a form of self-defence if necessary. The Carnival of Trinidad and Tobago's influence has spread globally to a diversity of countries worldwide as there are many Trinbagonian communities in places such as North America (Toronto being one of the biggest with the Toronto Caribbean Carnival), Europe and Japan. The tradition is continued today by many carnival bands and the 'King and Queen Showcase' competition. As Toronto is one of the biggest influencers out of Trinidad, Louis Saldenah, owner of the masquerader band Louis Saldenah Mas K Club, and Curtis Eustace (nephew of Norris Eustace) continue to win competitions of the King and Queen showcase, followed by first-time designer Nicholas Guy ("News Release." *Ontario Science Centre Awards the 2019 Innovation in Mas' Award to Nicholas Guy's Heartbeat of the Last Conflict at the Toronto Caribbean Carnival*). These two practices commemorate the emergence of slavery and the celebration of the new life free of enslavement. Carnival is celebrated, and Kalinda is practiced during the Carnival season as a reminder of the historical struggle that Africans mainly encountered to reside in a liberated society and remember the African heritage that moulded Trinidadians of African descent into members of society today holistically.

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