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Rebuilding the Ruins: Contemporary Performing Arts in Latin America and the Caribbean

Issue 3

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IYARIC is a graduate student-run journal at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, York University. The publication is intended to platform Black, Caribbean, and Indigenous voices and scholarship.

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Editorial Introduction

Keisha Bell

The need for resistance embodied by artistic and cultural performance in Latin America and the Caribbean has never been more crucial than right now. As I write, the world has witnessed the invasion of Venezuela by the United States after months of extra-judicial murders in the Caribbean Sea, ongoing US-imperial threats to Cuba, Mexico, and other Central American states, and the political and economic strong-arming of Caribbean nations to comply with United States' hegemonic aspirations.[1] Despite this, artists in the region continue what they have always done through their art—exposing and reimagining the world. Bad Bunny's seventh studio album *DeBI TiRaR MaS FOToS* won the Album of the Year at the 2026 Grammy Awards, making him the first Latino artist to do so in Grammy history. Recorded entirely in Spanish, the album is an unabashed love letter to the island of Puerto Rico. His September 2025 decision to exclude the US from his tour was in direct response to violent anti-immigration raids by the Department of Homeland Security. Jamaica lost two reggae legends—Jimmy Cliff and Third World's Stephen "Cat" Coore. Both artists helped to shape the sound and culture of musical protest in the 1970s, when Rastafarians were subject to political, social, and economic repression. Art is indeed resistance.

As a musician, ethnomusicologist and Caribbeanist, my intent with the Special Issue was to spotlight the rich musical heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean; a heritage forged in the brutality of genocide, enslavement, and indentureship, and the resistance and liberatory praxis it engendered. I then decided to broaden the scope of the issue to include other art forms which have not experienced the same global exposure. Thanks to the contributors, this issue has exceeded my expectations. The creative works, interviews, and critical essays are a testament to the diverse ways in which Latin American and Caribbean performance cultures have done and continue to do the work of resistance.

With eleven contributions, the Issue covers much ground: feminist and experimental theatre in Latin America, spoken word performance in Trinidad and Jamaica, oral theatrical tradition in Tobago, and three of the Caribbean's popular musical exports—calypso, reggae, and soca. Our contributors do not shy away from political commentary, addressing urgent issues of gender-based violence, migration, and diasporic identity. The issue spans the geographical breadth of the region, with contributors and content representing Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Brazil, Chile, Toronto, New York, and Finland.

"Bottle Gourd Sprout, Calabash Open Mic" and "Anthro-poets from East Port-of-Spain: Spoken Word as Arts-based Methodology for Ethnography in Urban Trinidad and Tobago" address spoken word performance from a first-person perspective and as research methodology. Sashoya Simpson's poem "REVEL" and cover art by Caleb Levy celebrate dance traditions that "dismantle the oppressive" through joyous performance.

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[1] Al Jazeera. 2026. "President Diaz-Canel Slams Trump's Bid to 'Suffocate' Cuba's Economy." Al Jazeera, January 31. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/31/president-diaz-canel-slams-trumps-bid-to-suffocate-cuba-economy"

"Rojo is the colour of memory" nuances the words "rojo" and "red" as metaphors for the impact of migration from Chile to Canada on the artist.

Our issue features reprinted articles which are connected through calypso. "Saving Calypso" by Trinidadian-Canadian author Gloria Blizzard delves into the rich and often overlooked history of calypso music through her interview with another Trinidadian, musician Jesse Ryan. Calypso and steel pan feature in the soundscape of Vanessa Godden's *Transference*, which they discuss in the interview "On Performance, Family, and Queerness: A Conversation with Vanessa Godden." *Transference* explores the intersection of queerness and diasporic Trinidadian identity through immersion in salt water-filled containers. As Godden moves from larger to smaller containers, we see them embody struggles of queer subjects negotiating belonging within prescribed structures.

The critical essays featured in this issue make important interventions in the fields of theatre and performance studies, Caribbean literary criticism, and ethnomusicology. Through their work, the authors illuminate how scholarship and praxis from the region is overlooked either by scholars of the global north, or by regional hegemonies. In "Black Liberation, Culture, and Ritual," Jamaican ethnomusicologist and curator of the Jamaica Music Museum, Herbie Miller, discusses the role that music and culture play in the wider project of Black liberation.

Working on this issue over the past year brings the same sense of satisfaction I receive when I see a composition from sketch to performance. Editing this issue is like writing for a symphony orchestra, where each piece harmonizes with others to illustrate the resilience and determination of Latin American and Caribbean peoples. I am grateful to the contributors and reviewers who donated their labour to this project. Special thanks to IYARIC's editor-in-chief, Tka Pinnock, and the CERLAC community at York University for their support.

Introducción editorial

Keisha Bell

La necesidad de resistencia que encarnan las expresiones artísticas y culturales en América Latina y el Caribe nunca ha sido tan crucial como ahora. Mientras escribo estas líneas, el mundo ha sido testigo de la invasión de Venezuela por parte de Estados Unidos tras meses de asesinatos extrajudiciales en el mar Caribe, las continuas amenazas imperialistas de Estados Unidos a Cuba, México y otros estados centroamericanos, y la presión política y económica sobre las naciones caribeñas para que se sometan a las aspiraciones hegemónicas de Estados Unidos.[1] A pesar de ello, los artistas de la región continúan haciendo lo que siempre han hecho a través de su arte: exponer y reimaginar el mundo. El séptimo álbum de estudio de Bad Bunny, DeBI TiRaR MaS FOToS, ganó el premio al Álbum del Año en los Premios Grammy del 2026, convirtiéndolo en el primer artista latino en lograrlo en la historia de los Grammy. Grabado íntegramente en español, el álbum es una descarada carta de amor a la isla de Puerto Rico. Su decisión en septiembre del 2025 de excluir a Estados Unidos de su gira fue una respuesta directa a las violentas redadas contra la inmigración llevadas a cabo por el Departamento de Seguridad Nacional. Jamaica perdió a dos leyendas del reggae: Jimmy Cliff y Stephen «Cat» Coore, de Third World. Ambos artistas contribuyeron a dar forma al sonido y la cultura de la protesta musical en la década de 1970, cuando los rastafaris eran objeto de represión política, social y económica. El arte es, sin duda, resistencia.

Como músico, etnomusicólogo y caribeñista, mi intención con este número especial era poner en relieve el rico patrimonio musical de América Latina y el Caribe, un patrimonio forjado en la brutalidad del genocidio, la esclavitud y la servidumbre, y la resistencia y la praxis liberadora que engendró. Entonces decidí ampliar el alcance del número para incluir otras formas de arte que no han tenido la misma exposición mundial. Gracias a los colaboradores, este número ha superado mis expectativas. Las obras creativas, las entrevistas y los ensayos críticos son un testimonio de las diversas formas en que las culturas escénicas de América Latina y el Caribe han llevado a cabo y siguen llevando a cabo la labor de resistencia.

Con once contribuciones, el número abarca muchos temas: el teatro feminista y experimental en América Latina, la performance spoken word en Trinidad y Jamaica, la tradición teatral oral en Tobago y tres de las exportaciones musicales populares del Caribe: el calypso, el reggae y la soca. Nuestros colaboradores no rehúyen los comentarios políticos y abordan cuestiones urgentes como la violencia de género, la migración y la identidad diaspórica. El número abarca toda la extensión geográfica de la región, con colaboradores y contenidos que representan a Trinidad y Tobago, Jamaica, Brasil, Chile, Toronto, Nueva York y Finlandia.

«*Bottle Gourd Sprout, Calabash Open Mic*» y «*Anthro-poets from East Port-of-Spain: Spoken Word as Arts-based Methodology for Ethnography in Urban Trinidad and Tobago*»

[1] Al Jazeera. 2026. "President Diaz-Canel Slams Trump's Bid to 'Suffocate' Cuba's Economy." Al Jazeera, January 31. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/31/president-diaz-canel-slams-trumps-bid-to-suffocate-cuba-economy"

abordan la interpretación de spoken word desde una perspectiva en primera persona y como metodología de investigación. El poema «REVEL» de Sashoya Simpson y la portada de Caleb Levy celebran las tradiciones de danza que «desmantelan lo opresivo» a través de una actuación alegre. «Rojo is the colour of memory» matiza las palabras «rojo» y «red» como metáforas del impacto de la migración de Chile a Canadá en el artista.

Nuestro número incluye artículos reimpresos relacionados con el calypso. «Saving Calypso», de la autora trinitense-canadiense Gloria Blizzard quien profundiza en la rica y a menudo ignorada historia de la música calypso a través de su entrevista con otro trinitense, el músico Jesse Ryan. El calypso y el steel pan aparecen en el paisaje sonoro de Transference, de Vanessa Godden, que se analiza en la entrevista «On Performance, Family, and Queerness: A Conversation with Vanessa Godden» (Sobre la interpretación, la familia y la homosexualidad: una conversación con Vanessa Godden). Transference explora la intersección entre la homosexualidad y la identidad trinitense diaspórica a través de la inmersión en contenedores llenos de agua salada. A medida que Godden pasa de contenedores más grandes a otros más pequeños, vemos cómo encarna las luchas de los sujetos homosexuales que negocian su pertenencia dentro de estructuras prescritas.

Los ensayos críticos que aparecen en este número realizan importantes intervenciones en los campos de los estudios teatrales y performativos, la crítica literaria caribeña y la etnomusicología. A través de su trabajo, los autores ponen en relieve cómo los estudiosos del norte global o las hegemonías regionales pasan por alto la erudición y la praxis de la región. En «Black Liberation, Culture, and Ritual» (Liberación negra, cultura y ritual), el etnomusicólogo jamaicano y conservador del Museo de la Música de Jamaica, Herbie Miller, analiza el papel que desempeñan la música y la cultura en el proyecto más amplio de la liberación negra.

Trabajar en este número durante el último año me ha proporcionado la misma satisfacción que siento cuando veo una composición desde el boceto hasta la interpretación. Editar este número es como escribir para una orquesta sinfónica, en la que cada pieza armoniza con las demás para ilustrar la resiliencia y la determinación de los pueblos de América Latina y el Caribe. Agradezco a todos los colaboradores que han dedicado su trabajo a este proyecto. Un agradecimiento especial al jefe de edicion de IYARIC, Tka Pinnock, y a la comunidad de CERLAC de la Universidad de York por su apoyo.

Introdução Editorial

Keisha Bell

A necessidade de resistência corporificada pelas performances artísticas e culturais na América Latina e no Caribe nunca foi tão crucial quanto agora. Enquanto escrevo, o mundo testemunhou a invasão da Venezuela pelos Estados Unidos depois de meses de assassinatos extrajudiciais no Mar do Caribe, contínuas ameaças imperialistas dos EUA a Cuba, México e outros países da América Central, e a coerção política e econômica de nações caribenhas para cumprir com aspirações hegemônicas estado-unidenses.[1] Apesar disso, artistas da região continuam fazendo o que sempre fizeram com sua arte—expondo e reimaginando o mundo. O sétimo álbum de estúdio de Bad Bunny, *DeBÍ TiRaR MaS FOToS*, ganhou o prêmio de Álbum do Ano no Grammy Awards de 2026, tornando-se o primeiro artista latino a alcançar esse feito na história do prêmio. Gravado inteiramente em espanhol, o álbum é uma carta de amor descarada à ilha de Porto Rico. A decisão do artista, em setembro de 2025, de excluir os EUA de sua turnê foi uma resposta direta às violentas batidas anti-imigração do Departamento de Homeland Security do país. A Jamaica também perdeu duas lendas do reggae—Jimmy Cliff e Stephen "Cat" Coore, da banda Third World. Ambos os artistas ajudaram a moldar o som e a cultura do protesto musical na década de 1970, quando os rastafáris estavam sujeitos à repressão política, social e econômica. A arte é, de fato, resistência.

Como musicista, etnomusicóloga e Caribeanista, minha intenção com essa Edição Especial era destacar a rica herança musical da América Latina e do Caribe; uma herança forjada na brutalidade do genocídio, da escravização e da servidão por contrato, e a práxis de resistência e libertação que isso engendrou. Decidi, então, ampliar o escopo da Edição para incluir outras formas de arte que não tinham a mesma exposição global. Graças aos colaboradores, essa Edição superou minhas expectativas. As obras criativas, entrevistas, e ensaios críticos são um testemunho das diversas maneiras pelas quais as culturas performativas da América Latina e do Caribe fizeram e continuam a fazer um trabalho de resistência.

Com onze contribuições, a Edição cobre um terreno amplo: teatro feminista e experimental na América Latina, performances de poesia falada em Trinidad e na Jamaica, tradições teatrais orais em Tobago, e três das exportações musicais populares do Caribe—calypso, reggae e soca. Nossos colaboradores encaram de frente as análises políticas, abordando questões urgentes de violência baseada em gênero, imigração e identidade diaspórica. A Edição abrange a extensão geográfica da região, com pesquisadores e conteúdos representando Trinidad e Tobago, Jamaica, Brasil, Chile, Toronto, Nova Iorque e Finlândia.

"Broto de Cabaça, Open Mic Calabash" e "Antro-poetas dos Pátios de East Port-of-Spain" abordam a performance de poesias faladas a partir de uma perspectiva de primeira pessoa e como metodologia de pesquisa. O poema "REVEL," de Sashoya Simpson, e a arte de capa, de Caleb Levy, celebram as tradições de dança que "desmantelam o opressor" por meio de performances cheias de alegria. "Vermelho é a Cor da Memória" refina o uso das palavras "*rojo*" e "*red*" como

[1] Al Jazeera. 2026. "President Diaz-Canel Slams Trump's Bid to 'Suffocate' Cuba's Economy." Al Jazeera, January 31. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/31/president-diaz-canel-slams-trumps-bid-to-suffocate-cuba-economy"

metáforas para o impacto sobre o indivíduo da migração chilena para o Canadá.

Nossa Edição apresenta artigos republicados que se conectam por meio do estilo musical calypso. "Salvando Calypso," da autora trinitária-canadense Gloria Blizzard, aprofunda-se na rica e frequentemente negligenciada história da música calypso, com sua entrevista com outro trinitário, o músico Jesse Ryan. A música calypso e os tambores de aço figuram na paisagem sonora de *Transference*, de Vanessa Godden, que eles discutem na entrevista "Sobre Performance, Família e Queerness: Uma Conversa com Vanessa Godden." *Transference* explora a interseção de *queerness* com a identidade diaspórica de Trinidad por meio da imersão corporal em recipientes cheios de água salgada. À medida que Godden passa de recipientes maiores aos menores, é possível observar a corporificação das lutas de sujeitos queers negociando pertencimento dentro de estruturas preestabelecidas.

Os ensaios críticos apresentados nesta Edição fazem importante intervenções nos campos de estudos teatrais e de performance, da crítica literária caribenha e da etnomusicologia. Com seus trabalhos, os autores ilustram como pesquisas e práxis da região são negligenciadas, seja por estudiosos do norte global ou por hegemonias regionais. Em "Libertação, Cultura e Ritual Negro," o etnomusicólogo jamaicano e curador do Jamaica Music Museum, Herbie Miller, discute o papel que a música e a cultura desempenham no projeto mais amplo de libertação negra.

Trabalhar nessa Edição ao longo do último ano trouxe a mesma sensação de satisfação que sinto ao ver uma composição musical ir do rascunho à performance. Editar essa Edição é como escrever para uma orquestra sinfônica, onde cada peça harmoniza com as outras para ilustrar a resiliência e a determinação dos povos da América Latina e do Caribe. Sou grata aos colaboradores e revisores que doaram seu labor a esse projeto. Um agradecimento especial à editora-chefe de IYARIC, Tka Pinnock, e à comunidade CERLAC da York University pelo apoio.

Artist Statement, “Dance Class”

Caleb Levy

Dance Class is a textured meditation on Jamaican youth, performance, and power constructed through instinctive mark-making, ancestral guidance, and visual dissonance. Rendered in acrylic and pastel on paper, the piece confronts the political weight borne by children growing up amid violence, colonial residue, and fragmented national identity in postcolonial Jamaica.

Inspired by years of witnessing performances by high school dance troupes in Kingston, Jamaica, the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (NDTC), and a close friend who danced with the NDTC, this work invokes the memory of movement: choreographed gestures that became vessels of story, resistance, and spiritual charge. The figures contort, collapse, and stretch within a compressed pictorial space, invoking both discipline and defiance. One childlike form bows forward as if in reverence or flight, while others loom, distort, or fade into abstraction, echoing the layered experience of Jamaican youth navigating structures of order, respectability, and self-expression. There is tension between containment and release, tradition and rupture. This painting emerged from memories of the coded performances demanded of Jamaican youth under the long shadows of colonial education and moral policing. At the same time, it honors the uncontainable energy of dancehall and the spiritual rhythms that pulse through our communities and bodies. Influenced by Basquiat, Wangechi Mutu, Jean Dubuffet, and Edna Manley, I create layered, symbolic forms that collapse time and space. *Dance Class* stands as both indictment and offering, a call to witness the political force of Jamaican youth performance as a site of survival, creativity, and liberation.

Caleb Levy is a visual artist from Kingston, Jamaica based in Massachusetts, USA. Levy is a PhD student in Physics at Harvard University. Levy works with acrylic, charcoal and pastels to illustrate the injustices of colonial violence in the Global South. He layers, obscures, and reworks images to reflect his experiences in Jamaica and his reckoning with the consequences of centuries of oppression throughout the majority world.

Black Liberation, Culture, and Ritual: An Interview with Herbie Miller

Keisha Bell and Herbie Miller

> *Our bones form a track from the El Mina to Cape Coast to the ports of the West Indies and the Americas . . . Those moaning blues, those groaning gospel and spiritual [songs], the shouts and the hollers, those are the things that inform our culture today.*
>
> \- Herbie Miller

In February 2025, I watched online from my home in Toronto as Jamaican historian and ethnomusicologist Herbie Miller addressed the Caribbean Military Academy's[1] Black History month celebration in Kingston, Jamaica. The one-time manager of Pan-African reggae artiste Peter Tosh spoke on the topic of music and black liberation, underscoring the emancipatory role of the performing arts in the Americas. Miller has had a long and distinguished career in the Jamaican cultural sector, with roles ranging from artist management, film composing, to music producer and entrepreneur. He founded the Blue Monk Jazz Gallery in Kingston which welcomed renowned pianist Monty Alexander at its opening. He has written and published extensively on Jamaican culture, music, and history and counted jazz luminaries such as Melba Liston, Randy Weston, and Max Roach as friends. A cultural historian, he currently serves as the musical director of the Institute of Jamaica and curator of the Jamaica Music Museum. Given the depth and breadth of his work, I knew that he would be the ideal person with whom I could delve into the subject of liberation and the performing arts.

Our conversation fittingly began with an exploration of what we mean by the term "art" in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean. Miller is clear from the start that the term is a Western colonial construction that has severed and dismembered into discrete parts—music, dance, drama, poetry, sculpture, painting, sports, food—what was once part of the everyday spirituality and celebration of our ancestors. Miller's framing of culture as ritual converges with theory explicated by Horacio Legrás (2022) which states that these cultural forms can be seen through the lens of *jouissance*. Jouissance, or enjoyment, unlike pleasure, is limitless and instinctual. In contrast, Euro-American scholars like Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan suggest that political and social order is established through the renunciation of instinct, connecting "art" to the temporary state of pleasure. Afro-diasporic and Indigenous cultural forms attempt to

[1] The Caribbean Military Academy is the first military university in the Caribbean located at Up Park Camp in Kingston.

restore this state of jouissance.

What began centuries earlier on the plantation as instinctual responses to oppression morphed into cultural production through the post-independence 1960s and 1970s as the Black Power movement spread across the African diaspora. This was the height of Jamaica's "Roots Reggae" as a form of counter-cultural expression. Beyond the handful of artists who achieved global recognition at the time—Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Third World—Miller reminds us of the many whose music engaged with the social, economic, and political struggles of Black working-class Jamaicans.[1] For Miller, music is a "ritual performance" (Miller 2018, 37). In our interview, he draws a through line from slavery, through the Rastafari movement, to the early years of Jamaican independence into the present day and shows us how cultural products can reflect liberation struggles.

Keisha Bell (KB): Having heard you speak previously, I believe we both start from the position that emancipation did not achieve the full liberation of African diasporic peoples. How do you see music and the performing arts as a manifestation of the ongoing struggle for Black liberation in Jamaica and the Caribbean writ large?

Herbie Miller (HM): For me, the "arts," what we in the West call "the arts," is ritual in traditional societies on the African continent, [and] in places like the Pacific. In many ancient cultures, ritual comprises objects, song, and dance, and many other performative activities. I would extend that to include things like sports in the modern era. Cricket, let's say, to jump a couple hundred years, the West Indies versus England. That set of West Indians, between the 1920s and 30s, where the West Indies team was composed of either White West Indians who were descendants of the plantocracy, and a few African and Indian players descended from the plantation workers, you'll find that even in that eleven there's a hierarchy, and you refer to [White players] as "mister." When Frank Worrell[2] took over as the captain of the West Indies cricket team, he brought a level of participation beyond what the English and the rest of them saw: West Indies cricket being a swashbuckling game, a carnival-type thing. Worrell instilled in his guys that "No. The carnival is beyond swashbuckling," and so we have to apply ourselves in such a way that while it is entertainment like a festival on a savannah, or a carnival, it also conveys a level of historical and sociological information to uplift the people. By the time the West Indies team was led by Guyanese player Clive Lloyd[3], you had a set of Black West Indians and Indo West Indians on that team who understood that this game of cricket is beyond bowling fast and licking six and four. We have taken this guerilla warfare to those who colonized us. And if we can properly beat them at this, we have won that battle in the war for total independence.

So we go back all these years and the role of the carnival, the festival, the ritual, that comprises song and dance and food; and, what that meant to the sustenance, the fortitude, the

[1] Link to a playlist featuring all songs mentioned in the interview is in the bibliography.
[2] Frank Worrell became the first Black captain of the West Indies team in 1960 after a campaign launched by C. L. R. James. https://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/01/c-l-r-james-campaign-against-crickets-racial-hierarchy/
[3] Clive Lloyd became captain in 1974.

resilience, the commitment to maintain in a culture under pressure from outsiders, which would mean giving up your traditional spiritual way of life to an imposed Judeo-Christian way of life. What has that done to our people since that imposition has become the norm? And each time yuh think that the playing field is level, new rules reach yuh that set yuh back again.

How does song, dance, and ritual, kumina, pocomania and gerreh,[4] the bamboula[5] and these other things play into liberation? How could a people moan and groan and otherwise sing these dirges and yet signify (Gates 1988) from that hellhole of the dungeons in which they were captured and stored until shipment through the door of no return across the turbulent waves until they got to the New World? And those who didn't make it and were thrown over. And those who were thrown over because the customs vessel was out there to intercept the ship, knowing that after the banning of the slave trade, not enslavement, but the trade in humans, they were going to be searched by the customs. So what yuh do? Yuh throw them overboard. And then claim insurance and get it paid!;[6] And those groaning gospel and spiritual, the shouts and the hollers, those are the things that inform our culture today.

When you hear from the American south of Howlin' Wolf, and T-bone Walker, and B. B. King;[7] and you hear from Jamaica, all of these mento singers, and these street corner shouters, and in Trinidad and across the New World, there's the equivalent of the blues and the gospel and the reggae and the samba and the bossa nova and the Pachanga[8] and all of these things are embedded in our culture. How have we used it to continue to free ourselves?

On the plantations, for example, if an overseer was a drunkard and a good-for-nothing bum, nothing better than a rapist who could use his power to assault any one of the women, and in many cases, though not spoken too loudly, the men, our people would signal to each other. So when our people are on this plantation and they sing songs signifying to each other, "Here comes Charlie Brown, that good-for-nothing bum," in their own way. As one of my reggae friends said: "when you think it's peace and [safety], is a sudden destruction."[9] "Fools dance to their own calamity," as Peter Tosh would say. And so while we're singing and dancing and carrying on, like the Jonkunnu celebrations[10] back in Sam Sharpe's day, what they call the Christmas rebellion[11]

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[4] Kumina emerged from spiritual practices of indentured labourers brought from Central Africa after the abolition of slavery in 1838. Pocomania is a syncretic spiritual practice that merges African spirituality with Christianity. Gerreh is an African-derived folk dance that is performed the second night after a death. https://jis.gov.jm/videos/jamaican-traditional-folk-forms-gerreh/

[5] The bamboula is a West African cultural form. Many non-European cultures do not have separate words for music or dance, and so the bamboula is a rhythm and a dance form which found its way into ragtime and early jazz.

[6] Miller is referring to the Zong massacre of 1781, where British slave traders murdered 130 enslaved Africans en route to Jamaica by throwing them overboard due to illness. The "cargo" was insured, and the ship's owners attempted to claim insurance after the fact. The insurers refused to pay, and the court ruled in favour of the owners. The insurers appealed the verdict, but their is no record of a second trial. See https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/london-stories/zong-massacre-trial/

[7] US blues musicians.

[8] Pachanga is a Cuban music and dance style that preceded salsa.

[9] Bob Marley,"Rat Race"

[10] Masquerade tradition that began in Jamaican antebellum period among the enslaved. https://www.tryonpalace.org/education/african-american-history/jonkonnu#:~:text=Jonkonnu%2C%20also%20known%20as%20John,%2C%20Bermuda%2C%20and%20North%20Carolina.

[11] Sam Sharpe was an enslaved Baptist deacon who organized a strike in December 1831 which spread throughout Western Jamaica and became known as the Baptist War.

the fools were dancing to their own calamity, because Sam Sharpe and his people had already planned what was going to happen at the end of Christmas—the rebellion would unfold. So, in a way you're using that masquerade, that festivity, that Christmas ritual, with the fifes and the drums, and the dancing, and the drunkenness, to cover, to mask, to camouflage what was going to come. If you read plantation history from a cultural perspective—the planning of the burning of the sugarcane fields—you'll see [resistance] in song, in dance, in those moments where the enslaved people could get together. Even Nunu, in that film called *Sankofa*, was this nice, pleasant, docile old African woman. She was the baddest slave on the plantation, , because she had that because she had that "Mammy," dumb and docile personality. But inside her belly, the revolution was boiling.

KB: Reframing cultural activities like sports, music, and dance as ritual moves us closer towards understanding the role of culture in black liberation. Can you speak about the performance of ritual in the post-independence decade of the 1970s? How did artists like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jacob Miller and Inner Circle, and Big Youth participate?

HM: I see those artists as a continuation of the [blues and mento musicians] we were just talking about, who we would not style as "artists," or [their work] as art. Because that word is a Western-inflicted word on our rituals. The mask [hanging] on the wall is not a work of art. It's a work of the shaman, of the priest, of the smelter, in whatever medium they work. It had spiritual and magical meanings. In the seventies, some very unlikely persons made some extremely powerful songs. Individuals we don't necessarily associate with the revolutionary fervor of a Peter, or a Bob. Let's take a guy like [lovers rock artist] Gregory Isaacs. You don't associate Gregory with [revolution]. But Gregory has some songs that Bob and Peter would be proud to call their own. He has one him seh "The Border," when he's talking about "I'm leaving out of Babylon, this place is not my home." You have another singer like Ken Boothe—"Black, Gold and Green" [a song about the Rastafarian spiritual home—Ethiopia]; he has a song called, "Is it Because I'm Black," and another called "Freedom Street." The lyrics to "Freedom Street" go: "We're gonna walk, walk, walk, down freedom street." We [normally] associate Ken Boothe with [love songs] "Puppet on a String" and "My Girl has Gone." And why could a Ken Boothe do that? Because he comes through a tradition that Mortimer Planno[12] was a part of, teaching them about Rastafari culture. They were a part of that early days of Ethiopian World Federation[13] though they might not have carried dreadlocks and chanted brimstone and fire and "kill cramp and paralyze,"[14] that was not their kind of rhetoric.

But to come to the guys who were explicit with this, I mean, let's start with [Bob] Marley - "no chains around my feet but I'm not free, I know I am bound here in captivity."[15] Mental slavery him talking about. We free, run up and down and jump and dance and sing and prance, but is your mind free? He comes back later and says—taking up from the words of [Marcus] Garvey:

[12] 2nd generation Rastafarian leader active during pre-Independence Jamaica.
[13] Pan-Africanist organization founded in New York City in 1937 with a view to encouraging solidarity across the diaspora and supporting Ethiopia during its fight against Italian invasion.
[14] Bob Marley, "Revolution" 1974
[15] "Concrete Jungle"

"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery."[16]

Of course, Peter Tosh was so explicit that he couldn't even mask it. "Yuh inna mi land, no school for black children, we're gonna fight against apartheid."[17] Don't care where you come from, as long as you're a Black man, you're African."[18] You can look at his body of work, I've written about it, look at some of my work on Peter Tosh [about] Paul Bogle's Revolution.[19] Third World: "Them lick him with the whip and grandpa jump di riddim."[20] Yes, that's why we sing and dance and skank the way we do, is like when the whip lick yuh, yuh find a funny move and a different vibe. It reflects all of that.

I remember showing *Sankofa* to some schoolchildren, and there were two parts where this one young girl in the class, the same time when they were flogging, every strike that the whip made, the girl grabbed her back and [flinched]. At the end of it, I called her up and said I noticed [her reactions]. And she said "Sir, every lick she get, ah feel it!"

I said, "How yuh mean?"

She said, "Ah feel it, it inside of me." This is a young girl at elementary school, primary school. She knows nothing about cultural memory and all those things, but she is acting it out.

We come across things that happened hundreds of years ago, and you feel it. Burning Spear: "Do you remember the days of slavery?"[21] "Do you remember." Repetition, he repeats these things. He says "I remember."

So, you're now directly responding to contemporary issues within a former slave colony that is still mentally on the plantation. The educational system, the church system, the few little parsons who might stand up as revolutionary within the church, dem get defrocked.

Your dreadlocks child is told she cannot come to school. They cite things about lice and health issues when you take care of your dreadlocks in such a way that it glistens in the sun. The way I see people with dreadlocks put in coconut oil and shea butter, and when yuh go school dem come to yuh with that? Oh, but the person whose hair naturally drops on their shoulder is fine? Something is wrong with these things. And these are the things why you hear them sing about 'War inna Babylon.'[22] We have to take on these things through music, through dance.

It's something that has come from the savannahs all the way through Gorée Island[23], through Cape Coast, through El Mina, across the Atlantic, landed us on this island, these islands, these pieces of a different North and South American continent. But the one thing that could not have been erased is that DNA, that which is inborn and for many of us we can regurgitate it, we can remember it, we can feel it, we can talk about it.

[Themes of liberation appeared in music] following the 1972 general election, when music

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[16] "Redemption Song"
[17] "Apartheid" Peter Tosh
[18] "African" Peter Tosh
[19] Miller, Herbie. 2018. "Sound the Drums, Blow the Horns: The Creative Ethos of Paul Bogle's Morant Bay War and the Liberationist Ethic of Peter Tosh's Music." *Jamaica Journa*l 37 (1-2): 36-45. DLOC
[20] "Rhythm of Life"
[21] "Slavery Days"
[22] "War Ina Babylon" Max Romeo
[23] Island off the Coast of Senegal which was the largest slave-trading centre on the African coast from the 15th to the 19th centuries. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26

catapulted Michael Manley to a landslide victory. Songs like "Look deh nuh, Pharoah house crash."[24] The former Prime Minister, Hugh Shearer, becomes "Pharoah." What does Pharoah in the Bible represent?

KB: Enslavement.

HM: The man who enslaved the Israelites. So, you turn Prime Minister Shearer into the man under whose administration our most progressive thinkers are arrested and their passports seized.

KB: Like Walter Rodney.

HM: Well, Rodney was just the tip of the iceberg now, but a lot of people, especially at UWI, had their passports seized—all the guys who were part of the *Abeng*[25] newspaper—they were seen as persons to be careful of. Then anything with [the word] "black" gets banned. You cannot read black power literature. If it's found in your possession, you are a subversive element. This is between 1968 to 1972.

KB: Because it was after this period that Manley was elected and he promoted an ethnic/cultural identity shift away from a "melting pot" towards the Black majority.

HM: '72 we started on that—remember you know, between [1962] and 1972, if I give you or anybody for that matter a ride in my car, and that person is found with a spliff, it's a mandatory *18 months* in prison you know, no questions asked. So, these kinds of ole time slavery day business—where two or more are gathered, get rid of them—[also known as] the Rogue and Vagabond Law,[26] some of which are still enforced today. How police dogs in the ole days were trained to attack people who [appear] a certain way. The whole culture comes out of resistance to such "illegal legality." And it still persists today, despite the negativity and the debasement that you find in so much of the music today. Not just Jamaican music, *wherever* it is. Music dat juss mek noise and mean nutten.

Say something! "Rastaman vibration, positive!"[27]

I think by 1980, [it was] following the election of 1980— the slogan being 'Turn them back'[28] — that we were really turned back. So what used to be a culture of dreadlocks, and [wearing] your colours, and the empress and the king man, the smoking of herb, whatever else them want to call it, the way in which the support for Southwest African liberation struggles, struggles in the

[24] "Pharoah House Crash." Prince Buster and the All Stars

[25] A weekly Jamaican newspaper published from February 1-September 27, 1969. It emerged at a radical political moment in post-independence Jamaica where the black power movement was on the rise. It started in response to protests over the banning of Walter Rodney from the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies. (UWI Mona Library)

[26] A colonial law dating back centuries, used to force newly freed Jamaicans to accept low wages on their former plantations or risk arrest for remaining on the property. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1839/may/30/jamaica-second-measure

[27] "Positive Vibration." Bob Marley

[28] This was a campaign slogan of the JLP headed by Edward Seaga. The party defeated Manley's PNP party in 1980. "Turn them back" meant 'turn back' the free education that the bauxite levy helped to fund.

Caribbean, alignment with countries like Cuba, Venezuela, Panama, who were under the heels of neo-colonialism, by the 1980s we lost that sense of our leadership; what used to be called "third world leadership" for which Michael Manley was recognized globally, by both those who were against him, and those who supported him. And what replaced it? Jeri curl, tight clothes, cocaine, everybody just got turned back.

KB: Do you think that music is no longer a site of resistance?

HM: It can be a site of the knee in your neck, it can also do that. Because there are those who don't care what they do and don't feel a responsibility to do the uplifting thing and say "Bwoy, watch here now, yuh don't haffi mek your children listen to my music yuh know; but my music is X-rated music." Yes, there is a place for X-rated culture, but it cannot be in the open domain.

But, the music. It's all in the music. Without the music, you aren't gonna get the dance, the poetry, and all of that. It's all in there; the good, the bad, the ugly. As Marcus Garvey says whatever you do, you must do it for the uplift of the race. You and I would say perhaps for the uplift of humanity, like when Black Uhuru sings "Solidarity, everybody wants the same thing out there, everybody wants a good life, so why not solidarity?"[29] Music always tells our stories.

[29] "Solidarity." Black Uhuru

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Discography

1. "Rat Race," *Rastaman Vibration*, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Island Records, 1976
2. "The Border," Gregory Isaacs and U Brown, GG's Records, 1977
3. "Black, Gold, and Green," Ken Boothe, *Black, Gold, and Green*, Trojan Records, 1973
4. "Is it Because I'm Black," Ken Boothe, Splash Records, 1972
5. "Freedom Street," Ken Boothe, *Freedom Street*, Beverley's Records, 1970
6. "Concrete Jungle," *Rastaman Vibration*, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Island Records, 1976
7. "Redemption Song," *Uprising*, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Island Records, 1980
8. "Apartheid," *Equal Rights*, Peter Tosh, Columbia Records, 1977
9. "African," *Equal Rights*, Peter Tosh, Columbia Records, 1977
10. "Rhythm of Life," *96 Degrees in the Shade*, Third World, Island Records, 1977
11. "Slavery Days," *Marcus Garvey*, Burning Spear, Fox Records, 1975
12. "Pharoah House Crash," *Wreck A Pum Pum*, Prince Buster and The All Stars, Melodisc 1968
13. "Positive Vibration," *Rastaman Vibration*, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Island Records, 1976

Keisha Bell is a Jamaican-born, Toronto-based pianist, composer, and arranger. She graduated with a Master's degree in music composition in 2021, releasing her first album, *Caribbean Yellow* in 2022. She has a wide range of musical influences and enjoys incorporating improvisational elements into her compositions, leaving room for performer interpretation. Dance, poetry, and Afrofuturist and speculative fiction have also informed her approach to music. Keisha is a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at York University. Her research on music and black placemaking in mid 20th century Toronto lies at the intersections of performance studies, Black Canadian history, visual culture, and archival research. Other research interests include jazz studies, postcolonialism in the Caribbean, and Jamaican Popular Music. She is a two-time recipient of the John Arpin Award in Fine Arts, and currently holds a SSHRC doctoral award.

Anthro-poets from East Port-of-Spain's Yards: Spoken Word as Arts-based Methodology for Ethnography in Urban Trinidad and Tobago[1]

amílcar peter sanatan with Fayth Seaton, Sean Singh, Deneka Thomas and Zariel Thomas

Abstract This multimedia presentation features the performances of four spoken word poets from East Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. During the period December 2024 to February 2025, we designed and facilitated a virtual spoken word workshop that applied arts-based pedagogies for ethnographic research. Through ethnographic observation and note-taking, poets and collaborators produced place-based analyses of social hierarchies, solidarities and inequalities in their communities in the form of spoken word. The literary and ethnographic imagination was articulated from the immediate environment of the yard, establishing this site of material culture as a central locus for communal and political insight. This multimedia presentation demonstrates the utility of ethnographic and literary insights to explore everyday life and politics in urban Trinidad and Tobago, with the poets serving as research collaborators in this co-created ethnography.

Keywords: spoken word; oral traditions; ethnography; urban geographies; cultural studies

Antropo-poetas de los *Yards* del Este de Puerto España: Poesía Oral como Metodología Basada en Las Artes para la Etnografía en Trinidad y Tobago Urbana

Resumen Esta presentación en multimedia reúne las interpretaciones de cuatro poetas de spoken word provenientes de East Port-of-Spain, Trinidad y Tobago. Entre diciembre de 2024 y febrero de 2025, diseñamos y llevamos a cabo un taller virtual de *spoken word* que empleó pedagogías basadas en las artes como metodología para la investigación etnográfica. Mediante la observación etnográfica sistemática y la toma rigurosa de notas, los poetas y sus colaboradores elaboraron análisis basados en las jerarquías sociales, las formas de solidaridad y las desigualdades presentes en sus comunidades, articulados a través del *spoken word*. La imaginación literaria y etnográfica se configuró en el entorno inmediato del patio, consolidando este espacio de cultura material como un lugar central para la reflexión comunitaria y la comprensión política. Esta presentación en multimedia demuestra la utilidad de integrar diferentes enfoques etnográficos y literarios para examinar la vida cotidiana y las dinámicas políticas en los contextos urbanos de Trinidad y Tobago, con los poetas participando como colaboradores de investigación en esta etnografía co-creada.

[1] "Place, Power and Words: Virtual Spoken Word Workshop" (2024/2025) is a research initiative out of a larger Kone Foundation-funded project, "Imagining Futures in the Margins of the State: Everyday Politics in Urban Communities in Trinidad and Zimbabwe." The project is a multi-sited, collaborative study led by Maarit Forde (Principal) with Florence Ncube, amílcar peter sanatan and Saana Hansen.

Palabras Clave: spoken word; tradiciones orales; etnografía; geografías urbanas; estudios culturales

Antro-poetas dos bairros de East Port-of-Spain: Poesia Falada como Metodologia Baseada nas Artes para uma Etnografia em Trinidad e Tobago Urbana

Resumo Esta apresentação multimídia destaca as performances de quatro poetas de poesia falada (*spoken word*) de East Port-of-Spain, Trinidad e Tobago. No período entre dezembro de 2024 e fevereiro de 2025, desenvolvemos e conduzimos uma oficina virtual de poesia falada que aplicou pedagogias baseadas nas artes para a pesquisa etnográfica. Por meio de observação etnográfica e anotações, os poetas e colaboradores produziram análises baseadas no lugar das hierarquias sociais, solidariedades e desigualdades de suas comunidades na forma de poesia falada. A imaginação literária e etnográfica foi articulada a partir do ambiente imediato do pátio, estabelecendo esse espaço de cultura material como um *locus* central para a compreensão comunitária e política. Esta apresentação multimídia demonstra a utilidade de perspectivas etnográficas e literárias para explorar a vida cotidiana e a política urbana em Trinidad e Tobago, com os poetas atuando como colaboradores de pesquisa nesta etnografia cocriada.

Palavras-chave: poesia falada; tradições orais; etnografia; geografias urbanas; estudos culturais

I was stationed in Kingston, Jamaica for the Christmas holidays. The *Place, Power and Words* virtual workshop on spoken word and ethnography was in motion. Meetings were set for early Saturday mornings. Before the first session started, I sent an email with the Zoom link, a WhatsApp reminder in the newly formed group chat, and private messages to applicants. After weeks of marketing the workshop exclusively for East Port-of-Spain residents, I received more re-shares and public commendation for the initiative by non-residents than from interested participants from partner communities. This experience evoked memories of prior place-based community organising efforts, which necessitated direct engagement with residents, fostering trust, and leveraging local human resources to disseminate information effectively.

East Port-of-Spain is a region located on the periphery of the capital city, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Inequalities regarding access to basic needs, a colonial legacy of slum clearance and public insecurity reproduce social and spatial inequalities throughout area. Driven by stigma and gang borderlines, spatial and social boundaries undermine equal social, economic and political participation of residents there as "fear and segregation characteri[s]e urban life in contemporary Trinidad and Tobago" (Forde 2018, 439).

Spoken word was selected as a pedagogical tool in the workshop because it is a popular art form rooted in the oral traditions of the Caribbean. Performers communicate in the nation language and Standardised English in "naturally selected registers of the language," which is "appropriate to particular contexts and situations" (Rohlehr 1989, 2). While spoken word is proudly celebrated in Caribbean performance culture, as an oral tradition, it is widely overlooked as a *literary* genre and remains underappreciated in Caribbean literary criticism (Sindoni 2010, 218). Up until the 1970s, with the popularisation of dub poetry and musical genres such as rapso within and beyond the Caribbean, the critical reception of oral and performance poetry in scholarship was uneven (Donnell and Welsh 1996, 295). Therefore, a core part of my personal artistic, scholarly and political mission has been to advance spoken word's scholarly recognition as a dynamic, legitimate, and vital genre within both literary and performance arts. Weekly, workshop participants exhibited their competence in writing and performing spoken word. The binary conception of the scribal/oral and literary/performative recasts a colonial division of knowledge and art from popular cultural expressions that are complex and subversive to hegemonic forms and traditions. The deliberate choice to co-create a spoken word arts-based ethnography was motivated by a decolonial politics to redress the "exclusionary nature of the anglophone Caribbean literary canon" (Rosenberg 2011, 349).

Morning birds were noisy in the background of my Kingston room. I waited ten minutes before the first participant logged in. It was Sean Singh. I met Sean a few years before during field work in his community. We discussed his background as a cultural activist and arts director of his performance arts group, "Soul Oasis Cultural Ambassadors" in Belmont and Morvant. Sean lived in Gonzales, a community in East Port-of-Spain. Though often highlighted in the media for instances of gang and gun violence, this area is also the birthplace of public and cultural icons of national development, such as the visual artist and poet, LeRoy Clarke. Sean and several members of his group have performed internationally and at the Prime Minister's Best Village and the Dimanche

Gras calypso events in Trinidad and Tobago. As we spoke, workshop participants trickled in.

All poets and collaborators were unable to be on camera. Some were involved in childcare responsibilities, one was at their weekend job, another en route to a theatre rehearsal. We were using communication devices in different countries—Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago—for our first meeting. We had different experiences or understandings about the various communities that made up East Port-of-Spain. A sense of collective optimism emerged regarding the workshop process after an outline of the workshop, ethical guidelines, and project outcomes were shared, and participants were informed of their role as research collaborators in the ethnography. Fayth Seaton, from Picton, at the close of the session said, "I work with a group in my community, and I have an NGO that will pretty soon be going into schools." Fayth and her team provide reading interventions for children, and she was keen to blend spoken word in her outreach strategies. During meetings, we were partially brought into each other's lives, speaking and sharing over background sounds of our environments and weekend routines.

The workshop was grounded in a framework of anthro-poetry used as a "creative pedagogical tool where research collaborators immerse themselves in their communities and speak to the dynamic, unequal and ever-shifting power relations that undergird their observations."[1] Ethnographic writing has long been understood as a literary genre (Haripriya 2018). It blends observation, poetics, and the documentation of archival facts and affective fields. This arts-based methodology involved an ethnography of the workshop space as well as ethnographic writing about everyday urban life in East Port-of-Spain by research collaborators. Those in the workshop valued this format. They found that questions derived from field notes and the weekly recording of emotions and understandings fostered the creative writing process. It was important for me, as the researcher and facilitator, to abandon received understandings about urbanity, places in East Port-of-Spain such as Laventille and Morvant, and "expert" knowledge about spoken word and literature. Re-prioritising the need for researchers to theorise and explain, through spoken word and a collaborative ethnography I "allow[ed] myself to feel and be affected" (Stainova 2019, 217).

In the spoken word videos of this publication, collaborators confront issues of violence, fragile urban infrastructures and the importance of familial and communal networks. Through spoken word, they explored moral ambiguities, articulated their hopes, and transparently communicated their varying perspectives and assumptions about the social environment they were observing. Notably, poets and collaborators situated the geographies of their poetry and grounded their metaphors in the immediate, material environment, specifically the urban yards around them. They drew on the mundane, everyday technologies like plastic buckets or recalled sensory details of food prepared by family members in the home. This yard spatiality inherent in their work spoke to both a "communal intimacy" (Radović 2016) and a political standpoint, demonstrating how engagement with material culture and embodied experience within shared urban spaces becomes the foundation for ethnographic insight in East Port-of-Spain. The virtual workshop transformed from a pedagogical space to communicate the poetics of interior worlds to a virtual communal space for relationality. Furthermore, ethnographic poetry considers "insider-

[1] Application of the concept "anthro-poetry" as reflected in the course outline for "Power, Place and Words: Virtual Spoken Word Workshop" (2024/2025).

outsider tensions" (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010, 7) in the cultural study of marginalised communities. In this multimedia presentation, viewers will have the opportunity to experience poets and collaborators use of metaphor, anaphora and other literary devices because "[e]thnographic poems must not only reveal worlds from our research but also devote careful attention to the craft of poetry itself" (Zani et al. 2019, 185). At the end of the workshop, we all revisited our communities with "new" ethnographic eyes, communicated hopes, dread and futures in our own voices into a larger tapestry of East Port-of-Spain's yards.

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Sean Singh

Gonzales

Bam bam bam
Morning greeting creates mourning of a mother

Is tough love
for the tribe standing
until the URP cheque is fed
then, they rip each other

Check?
Check how many bodies that were buddies
they embodied the required love

Is Gonzales where Guns a live

Old man Frank sweet cane patch
houses a semiautomatic rifle
in case ants get wild

In Gonzales where the guns a live

Road blocks are orchestrated
by automated triggers
"I doh know da car"

In Gonzales where guns a live

Where Miss Pearl avocado tree
strongly suggested to be invested by
the pied piper whose echoing sounds
make some cover their ear

In Gonzales where guns a live

Breathe

Exhale

Coast, corner clear

Hands clapping
early Sunday morning was welcoming
vibrating a difference

pulsating resistance

a reminding existence
drum shots beat
the sound of the gun shots
meet to pray, the doors shut
tight at night
when your eyes shut
stenched spranger buss
he white shot

Shot shot shot
in the hole

Shut shut shut up
look down
them fellers coming up
man yuh station

Police in their station cock up
glock armed, triggers cock up
absent law still grab and lock up

After the trade from a land so far-fetched
bullets with man name mentally etched
This is not a fete in here this is....unfair

The ammunition did not get the memo
woman and children are not to be touched
but it touchy

Because the bullet points are the bullet points
with the bullet's point to gain bullet points
so is bullet bullet bullet, that's the point

It pointless

We need to start stopping
and stop starting the thinking about it

That's yuh brother
he mother
their sister

Whoever
we all in danger
'cause all the ghost yuh take
'cause all the ghost yuh take
you is not the true collector
we just sacrificing one another

for an over glorified perimeter

At night
after overcast days
actors going off script-ure

Raining sad songs of hopelessness

Sean Singh is a cultural ambassador and social entrepreneur from Picton and Gonzales in East Port-of-Spain. He is the founder and artistic director of "Soul Oasis Cultural Ambassadors" (SOCA), a community-based organisation that has produced several plays, musical and cultural events. Singh has written and performed calypso, composed music and has won the award for Best Written Script in 2020 at the Best Village Competition organised by the Ministry of Sport and Community Development. Singh has performed regionally and internationally, including in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Venezuela, Wales and Japan.

Fayth Seaton
Sweet Paradise

Stigma, there is stigma
Is it really true?
A sweet paradise has lost its beauty

Enticing mas and steel pan
with vivid magical creations

We don't seem to leverage
our tourism product...Listen up!

Sirens wailing, tires escaping
rain falling, buckets of drops
children playing, mothers crying

Alas, food done
children run to have their fill

Goooaaaal bai, sweet melodies
talented children need space
Yuh understand?

Yutes need space

It's not about the numbers game yuh know
that secures a space
in the grave

The ole time days:
granny making plum and sugar cake
sweets to fill your belly with love
we thrived for and honesty
they are the ones who provide
community, too bad those loving grandmas aren't here

Violence! *sigh*
Oh dear
Pop pop pop cornnnn

Fayth Seaton is an accounting professional and entrepreneur from Picton, Laventille. She is the Managing Director of her business and a certified chef.

Zariel Thomas
Curses

The cycle that never stops
until the heart stops

We have a dream
is ninety-nine percenters
to be apart of the bigger scheme

I don't think they notice
here, we have the biggest of dreams
despite the least of opportunity

The tongue – a mass weapon of destruction
a spell, cast out of the mouths of the nation

Cursed to repeat the cycle that never stops
until the heart stops

Corner sitting, soft drink drinking, biscuit eating
heel at the end of slipper wearing, weed smoking
pants under yuh bamcee wearing
boxers have a hole so I seeing
gun pulling young men
soon to be child father

We try to speak, but our cries goes through one ear
and passes out the other

We don't want the scraps that you've left us

No child making, being beaten when he frustrated
tears running, Jordan shoe on foot but nothing
in the head, thinking, going to school
never finishing because belly bigging
fighting for man in my school uniform
so, drawers showing, moving
from house to house
'cause nobody wanting yuh

The cycle that never stops
until the heart stops

We tired, and if allyuh have nothing good to say
then don't say anything at all

These two-tongued well wishes
when what you really mean to say is:

These good for nothing, space wasting
them always embarrassing us Black people eh!

My child will never turn out like that
you from Laventille
you will never amount to nothing
all them young men and them know is to breed gyal
all them young girls know is to run down man

This cycle that never stops
until the heart stops

Zariel Thomas is a spoken word performer from Red Hill, Laventille. Thomas was originally from Maloney Gardens in East Trinidad. She recently graduated from sixth form school at St. George's College. Thomas works as a Library Assistant in the National Library and Information System Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. She has extensive experience as a member of "Girl Be Heard," a female-led spoken word company.

Deneka Thomas
Boys Who Never Die

They say he dead but look
how he on the block still
Bent over a game of wappy
Laughter cutting through the night
Like a three-line

They say he dead but listen
His name in the echo of a mother
calling her son home before the streetlight comes on
in every screech of tyres
in the quiet before the gunshots buss open the dark

They say he dead but watch
he in the rearview mirror of a police car
in the shadow that stretch long on the lonely pavement
in the eyes of his bredren who
spray paint their names onto walls
making them landmarks of the community

There is a funeral but
he don't stay buried

He in the smoke rising from a spliff
in the peeling mural on the palour
in the way the east dry river forgets nothing
even if after the city does

The boys who do not die
multiply in memory
in myth

In the way their names stay sharp in the minds
of those who loved them like floods

Making them eternal

Deneka Thomas is a spoken word artist, a poet, arts educator, and activist from Gonzales in East Port-of-Spain. They are recognised internationally for their work on gender issues, LGBT+ advocacy, women's empowerment, and environmentalism. Thomas is the 2018 Grand Slam Champion of the First Citizens National Poetry Slam, and was third place winner in 2019. They have performed and spoken at TEDx Port of Spain, the Trinity College Hip Hop Festival, the Women Deliver Conference, the Nairobi Summit (ICPD+25), and at several other local and international events. Their work has also been published in several literary journals including *Moko Magazine* and *Shade Literary Arts*.

Reclaiming Resistance: Brazilian Feminist Voices and the Theatre of the Oppressed

Fatima Qaraan

Abstract Feminist activists in Brazil have powerfully adapted Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, using participatory theatre to highlight and resist women's experiences of oppression. Through interactive performances, audiences witness struggles and collectively problem-solve, creating a democratic space for community building and agency. This paper examines how Brazilian feminist theatre groups use Boal's methodology to challenge patriarchal norms and reclaim cultural and intellectual labor. By analyzing the intersections of theatre, gender, and politics, the research emphasizes how these performances foster solidarity, amplify women's voices, and disrupt long-standing patterns of marginalization. Drawing on case studies from Brazil, the analysis considers how the *Theatre of the Oppressed* has been specifically transformed to address issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive rights, framing these interventions as acts of narrative reclamation and resistance. This research centres participatory practices within the Brazilian context to demonstrate how feminist applications of Boal's work have contributed to broader movements for social transformation. The *Theatre of the Oppressed* thus serves as a powerful framework for feminist resistance and collective reimagining in Brazil.

Keywords: theatre of the oppressed, feminist resistance, cultural reclamation, Brazil

Reivindicando la Resistencia: Voces Feministas Brasileñas y el Teatro del Oprimido

Resumen Las activistas feministas en Brasil han adaptado de manera contundente el Teatro del Oprimido de Augusto Boal, utilizando el teatro participativo para visibilizar y resistir las experiencias de opresión vividas por las mujeres. A través de presentaciones interactivas, el público presencia estas luchas y participa en la búsqueda colectiva de soluciones, creando un espacio democrático para la construcción comunitaria y el fortalecimiento de la agencia. Este artículo examina cómo los colectivos de teatro feminista brasileño emplean la metodología de Boal para desafiar las normas patriarcales y reivindicar el trabajo cultural e intelectual. Al analizar las intersecciones entre teatro, género y política, la investigación enfatiza cómo estas actuaciones fomentan la solidaridad, amplifican las voces de las mujeres y desarticulan patrones de marginación arraigados. A partir de estudios de caso en Brasil, el análisis considera cómo el Teatro del Oprimido ha sido específicamente transformado para abordar cuestiones como la violencia de género y los derechos reproductivos, enmarcando estas intervenciones como actos de recuperación narrativa y resistencia.

Esta investigación centra las prácticas participativas dentro del contexto brasileño para demostrar cómo las aplicaciones feministas de la obra de Boal han contribuido a movimientos más amplios de transformación social. Así, el Teatro del Oprimido funciona como un poderoso marco para la resistencia feminista y la reimaginación colectiva en Brasil.

Palabras Clave: teatro del oprimido; resistencia feminista; reivindicación cultural; Brasil

Recuperando a Resistência: Vozes Feministas Brasileiras e o Teatro do Oprimido

Resumo Ativistas feministas no Brasil adaptaram de maneira contundente o Teatro do Oprimido de Augusto Boal, utilizando o teatro participativo para evidenciar e resistir às experiências de opressão das mulheres. Com performances interativas, o público testemunha as dificuldades e busca soluções coletivamente, criando um espaço democrático para a construção comunitária e para a agência. Este artigo examina como grupos de teatro feminista brasileiros utilizam a metodologia de Boal para desafiar as normas patriarcais e reivindicar o trabalho cultural e intelectual. Ao analisar as interseções entre teatro, gênero e política, a pesquisa enfatiza como essas performances promovem a solidariedade, amplificam vozes de mulheres e rompem com padrões históricos de marginalização. Com base em estudos de caso do Brasil, a análise considera como o Teatro do Oprimido foi especificamente transformado para abordar questões como violência baseada em gênero e direitos reprodutivos, enquadrando essas intervenções como atos de retomada de narrativa e de resistência. A pesquisa centraliza as práticas participativas no contexto brasileiro para demonstrar como aplicações feministas do trabalho de Boal têm contribuído para movimentos mais amplos de transformação social. O Teatro do Oprimido serve, assim, como um referencial poderoso para a resistência feminista e a reimaginação coletiva no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: teatro do oprimido; resistência feminista, recuperação cultural, Brasil

In 1973, theatre practitioner Augusto Boal was exiled from Brazil due to the "cruel and murderous civic and military dictatorship" (Boal 2008, ix) where traditional avenues of dissent had been restricted (Bezerra 2022). During his exile, Boal wrote *Teatro dos Imprimidos* (Theatre of the Oppressed) in which he argues that theatre, in all contexts, is inherently political. When practiced correctly, Boal (2008) explains, theatre can be a "very efficient weapon [and] for this reason the ruling class strive to take permanent hold . . . utilizing it as a tool of domination" (Boal 2008, xxiii). This domination is accomplished by dividing the stage into two distinct capacities, those who go to the stage and act and those who remain at a distance as passive spectators or "the masses, the people" (Boal 2008, xxiii). To further entrench this division, the aristocracy labeled certain actors as protagonists to represent the aristocrats while all other actors represented the masses and the people. The most effective attempt to abolish this separation though, Boal (2008) argues, was happening all over Latin America at the time he was writing. The revolutions taking place were destroying "the barriers created by the ruling class," (Boal 2008, xxiv) and marked the beginning of the people's revolution to seize back the powerful weapon of performance, a "conquest of the means of theatrical production" (Boal, xxiv). Drawing on the work of the Madalena-Anastácia collective in Rio de Janeiro and the Capulanas Cia. de Artes Negra collective in Sao Paulo, this paper will show how Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* has been used as a source of feminist resistance for women in Brazil from the 1960s onwards.

By examining the intersection of theatre, politics, and gender, this research explores how this theatrical methodology has empowered women to challenge patriarchal structures and resist cultural commodification. Feminist theatre often incorporates intersectionality, addressing overlapping systems of oppression related to gender, race, and class. This particular methodology rejects hierarchical and binary frameworks in theatrical processes and redefines leadership and representation, while creating spaces for marginalized voices to challenge systemic inequality. In Brazil, patriarchal norms and systemic violence against women remain persistent, perpetuating gender inequality (Nakamura et al. 2023; Caulfield and Schettini 2017). In 2003, femicide rates for Black women was "23 percent higher than their White counterparts" and, ten years later, in 2013 increased to 67 percent, compared to that of White women (Gonçalves 2017). This is due, Giani Monteiro et al. (2021) argue, to Black women's "historical dimension in Brazilian society as a bitter legacy from the slavery period [still evident] in social and economic disadvantages of Black women in the country . . . [who] face greater obstacles in accessing qualified health services, and a higher prevalence of sexual and reproductive health problems" (Monteiro et al., 2021, 361). Despite legislative advancements such as the Maria da Penha Law (2006), legislation targeting domestic violence against women by creating mechanisms to curb such violence (Prestes and Nascimento 2016), in 2020 the World Health Organization ranked Brazil fifth for the highest femicide rates in the world (Gonçalves 2017).

Since the 1960s, Brazilian feminist movements have utilized theatre as a tool of resistance, although there have been many obstacles slowing down the progress of these actions. Romano (2021) argues that "contemporary feminist engagement with political theatre in Brazil began in the 1960s, in the wake of the struggle for human rights and the freedom of women . . . though it has diminished in intervening years" (Romano 2021, 390). The civil-military coup responsible for

for exiling Boal contributed to the setbacks experienced by feminist groups based on economic, political and social changes. Andersen Sarti (2004) explains that the situation of women in Brazil was influenced by European and North American feminist movements in the 1960s, "calling into question the traditional gender hierarchy" (37). This crucial contemplation took place, "at the same time as the unfolding of the bitter context of the Latin American dictatorships, which silenced discordant voices" (Sarti 2004, 37). In 1996, "the academic space opened up to an eminently political event that debated torture during the military dictatorship in Brazil . . . discussing the presence of the woman as a protagonist in the resistance to the dictatorship and, for the first time, as a victim of specific violence" (Sarti 2004, 38). Romano (2021) describes this violence as not only physical but psychological with "an intense campaign carried out by the mass media, supported by state institutions that devalued women" (390). This was followed by "the banning of debates about gender inequality in the performing arts which continued to occur in the next century" (Romano 2021, 391).

Efforts to silence women across the country remained a culture norm. By the early 1990s, Brazil's women's rights movement responded to this silence and gained significant momentum, particularly due to the establishment of women's police stations (Delegacias de Defesa da Mulher) in the mid–1980s—a direct response to feminist advocacy against high rates of violence targeting women (Hautzinger 1997; Santos 2004). The first station opened in São Paulo in 1983, staffed by women officers dedicated to investigating crimes like rape and domestic violence (Santos 2004). This institutional advance encouraged many women to report abuse that had previously been hidden, and the number of complaints steadily increased, giving greater visibility to the issue (Santos 2004). By 1990, there were 80 women's police stations across Brazil, and this number continued to rise throughout the decade, with 339 stations reported by the early 2000s (Santos 2004). There was a significant increase of reports of domestic violence and femicide, reflecting both heightened awareness and improved reporting mechanisms (Guimaraes 2007). Studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s indicated that most violence occurred within the home, typically perpetrated by spouses or partners, with physical abuse being the most common form (Guimaraes 2007). The period also saw the rise of feminist activism demanding legal reforms and better protection for women, exemplified by organizations like SOS Mulher (SOS Woman), which launched impactful campaigns such as "Quem ama não mata" (Those who love don't kill), in response to a series of high-profile murders of women by their partners (Guimaraes 2007, 6). However, despite these advances, violence against women remained widespread, frequently hidden behind closed doors and often going unpunished due to persistent patriarchal attitudes and limited gender-sensitive training for police staff (Santos 2004; Machado de Vasconcelos et al. 2024).

It was not until early 2010, that feminisms and feminist expression made a prominent comeback to the Brazilian theatre scene (Romano 2021). As political feminist theatre gained traction "women artists [all over Brazil] . . . dedicated their actions to focusing on femicide, domestic violence, harassment . . . [and] reproductive rights" (Romano 2021, 391). Rio de Janeiro-based theatre practitioner, Bárbara Santos, directed the first women-led laboratory with the intention "to develop productions in which women were not blamed for the sexist violence

they face" (Prefeitura de Marica 2022). Santos aimed to cultivate a theatre group where women could openly discuss oppressive experiences without feeling as if they needed to justify themselves or their stories (Bernardete Toneto 2022). From this laboratory, Santos developed a re-imagining of Boal's work through a critical feminist lens called *Teatro das Oprimidas* (Theatre of the Oppressed for Women). Santos (2023) describes her recreation as:

> a theatrical methodology focusing on how to face oppression from a feminist perspective . . . it is recognizing that the oppressions we face exist because we live in a patriarchal and capitalist system where the masculine gender, white people, and the issue of hetero-normativity has more value . . . so we consider this before making our play . . . because we cannot tell any story without considering this system." (Centro do Teatro de Oprimido 2023, 00:41:00).

This sudden upsurge in feminist theatre "took place adjacent to the public inquiry about the 'speech space' of the so-called minorities, fighting against the privileges of whiteness and cisnormativity, and speaking about unfixed identities," (Romano 2021, 391). Romano acknowledges that this "necessary examination of [Brazilian] ways of life," would not have been possible without, "the long struggle of black people, [and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community] with whom women share a history of oppression" (Romano 2021, 391).

In 2015, Brazil experienced a "'Brazilian Feminist Spring,' making visible the recovery of feminist militance and growth in the awareness of gender inequality and intersectionality with sexuality, social class and ethnicity–race markers" (Romano 2021, 391). During this feminist spring, Santos was "faced with the demand from black women to experience a laboratory that articulated gender and race" (Ribeiro 2023, 14). In response to this demand, Santos created the Madalena-Anastácia Collective for "black women who were interested in aesthetically investigating their experiences in a structurally racist and sexist society" (Ribeiro 2023, 14). The Madalena-Anastácia fulfilled "the need to increase the participation of artist-activists as facilitators of the production processes and of dialogue with the public" (Santos 2019, 119), epitomizing Boal's initial intentions for the *Theatre of the Oppressed.* The collective uses Boal's Forum Theatre, an interactive theatrical technique where audience members become 'spect-actors' who can stop the performance and step in to change the outcome of a scene depicting social or political problems (Boal 2008). This technique serves as both a group-based problem-solving method and a tool for meaningful discussion, attracting participants through reason and emotion to explore creative solutions to community issues and oppression without commanding or instructing (MacDonald and Dickinson 2001). The purpose of this methodology, Ribeiro argues, is to allow the activists to "put themselves in the shoes of those investigating their ethical-political sufferings, then confront the oppressions they experience and theatrically question other women and men about their stances on relevant black social issues" (Ribeiro 2023, 14). Boal's Forum theatre provides the Madalena-Anastácia's with the necessary tools to provoke discussions around systemic inequalities and to empower participants to envision solutions to these challenges.

Another prominent Brazilian feminist theatre group practicing Boal's techniques is the Capulanas Cia. de Artes Negra "founded in . . . São Paulo, by four Black women—Adriana Paixão, Débora Marçal, Flávia Rosa and Priscila Obaci " (Romano 2021, 391). Their work, similarly,

to the Madalenas, aims to deconstruct the privileges historically embedded in Brazilian theater and transform it from "a social event for a few," to a platform for marginalized voices, especially Black women (Stefanel, 2013). The Capulanas incorporate Boal's methods into their creative process by employing collaborative direction and a non-naturalistic theatrical language where the body and collective expression are central (Romana 2021), echoing Boal's emphasis on embodied participation and social dialogue. Their performances have drawn inspiration from the "life stories and aesthetics and creative experiences of figures such as Maria Nascimento, Margarida Trindade, Clélia Guerreiro Ramos and Thereza Santos who were at the forefront of Black cultural and pedagogical artistic actions that were often made invisible by male domination that comes from the social problems generated by machismo, racism and many other ways that [the Black Brazilian community] is subjected to" (Lourenço 2021, 183). The Capulanas also host "reflection groups on feminism and Blackness, using theatre as an instrument for dialogue and direct intervention" (Romano 2021, 392), mirroring Boal's goal of using theater for "social change, where personal and collective oppressions are explored and confronted in a participatory setting" (Sandi Diaz 2007). By integrating feminist theory with participatory performance techniques, the Capulanas exemplify how art can serve as both a site of resistance and a catalyst for social transformation.

Having examined the work of the Madalena-Anastácia and Capulanas Cia. de Artes Negra collectives, it becomes evident that these groups do more than simply perform Boal's techniques. They actively transform them to address the specific realities of Black women facing violence and systemic oppression in Brazil. Both collectives utilize participatory theatre not only as a means of storytelling but as a dynamic tool for empowerment and social change. Their performances invite audiences to engage directly with the actors and disrupt traditional spectator roles, fostering a collective space where experiences of gendered and racial violence can be openly confronted and challenged. This collective articulation of oppressive experiences and call for resistance is crucial in a context where Black women disproportionately suffer from femicide and systemic neglect. Together, these case studies illustrate how Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* serves as a vital framework for Brazilian feminist groups to navigate and contest the complexities of intersectional violence. The Madalena-Anastácia and Capulanas Cia de Artes Negra collectives adapt these theatrical methods to reflect the lived realities of Black women, and have contributed to a broader feminist movement that is inclusive, participatory, and deeply rooted in community empowerment. Their work exemplifies how theatre can transcend performance to become a potent form of social intervention, challenging structural inequalities and inspiring collective action against violence. These initiatives have created a space for Brazilian women to reclaim their agency within oppressive systems while envisioning alternative futures rooted in equality and justice. Initiatives like Teatro das Oprimidas empower women to critique societal norms while rehearsing strategies for real-world change. This approach highlights the transformative potential of theatre in fostering solidarity and envisioning alternative futures rooted in equality and justice.

The Madalena-Anastácia and Capulanas Cia de Artes Negra collectives encourage important dialogue and action by creating spaces for women to directly challenge patriarchal structures in Brazilian society. Their activist approach aligns with broader feminist activism in

Brazil that seeks to dismantle cultural commodification of women while advocating for racial justice and intersectional equality (Gomaa 2024). These collectives' actions ratify the feminist insight that the personal is also political, because the work accomplished by their use of the *Theater of the Oppressed* explores the subjective perspective of the problem, exposing the social structure that fosters it to reveal the mechanisms of oppression that sustain and perpetuate the patriarchal system. Through the intersection of theatre, politics, and gender, Boal's methodology serves as a critical framework for understanding how performance can challenge oppressive systems and foster social change. Boal's techniques are embraced by these collectives to address political issues, demonstrating how theatre can transcend traditional boundaries and become a powerful instrument for challenging oppression and envisioning equitable futures. These examples demonstrate how Boal's methods have been effectively used in Brazil to address feminist concerns, empowering women to reclaim narratives and resist oppression through participatory theatre practices. The legacy of Augusto Boal's methodologies continues to influence contemporary feminist activism in Brazil, providing both a language and a practice through which marginalized women can reclaim agency and demand justice. In the ongoing fight against femicide and violence toward women in Brazil, feminist theatre stands as a compelling example of how art and activism can unite to challenge oppression and build more just and equitable societies.

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From Roots to Rhythms: The Development and Musical Diversity of Chutney Music

Shelisa Cameil Akbar

Abstract Chutney music reflects the Indo-Caribbean experience, shaped by a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and geographical forces. This paper defines the genre and traces its evolution from the indentureship-era sugar plantations to its emergence as a global diasporic phenomenon. By examining the transition from traditional *Maticoor* rites and Hindu devotional roots to contemporary "rum song" and "wedding house" anthems, this study positions Chutney as a sonic archive of cultural survival. Central to this analysis is the genre's distinctive sound, particularly the role of traditional instrumentation—dholak, dhantal, and harmonium—alongside modern influences. Through comparative lyrical analysis, the paper explores how musical hybridity and syncretism enabled Chutney to absorb elements of Bollywood, Soca, and broader Caribbean traditions. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how processes of cross-cultural exchange reshaped Indo-Caribbean identity, offering new perspectives on gender, ethnicity, and sexuality within the West Indian diaspora. By mapping these rhythmic and thematic shifts, the paper highlights Chutney's role as a dynamic medium for negotiating postcolonial identity.

Keywords: Chutney, Maticoor, Hindu, Indo-Caribbean, Trinidad, Guyana

De Raíces a Ritmos: El Desarrollo y la Diversidad Musical de la Música *Chutney*

Resumen La música chutney refleja la experiencia indo-caribeña, conformada por una compleja interacción de fuerzas históricas, socioeconómicas y geográficas. Este artículo define el género y traza su evolución desde las plantaciones azucareras de la era del contratismo hasta su aparición como un fenómeno diaspórico global. Al examinar la transición de los ritos tradicionales de Maticoor y las raíces devocionales hindúes hacia los himnos contemporáneos de "*rum song*" y "*wedding house*", este estudio posiciona al chutney como un archivo sonoro de supervivencia cultural. En el centro de este análisis se encuentra el sonido distintivo del género, particularmente el papel de la instrumentación tradicional —*dholak, dhantal, and harmonium* — junto con influencias modernas. A través de un análisis comparativo de letras, el artículo explora cómo la hibridez y el sincretismo musicales permitieron que el chutney absorbiera elementos de Bollywood, el soca y tradiciones caribeñas más amplias. En última instancia, esta investigación demuestra cómo los procesos de intercambio intercultural transformaron la identidad indo-caribeña, ofreciendo nuevas perspectivas sobre género, etnicidad y sexualidad dentro de la diáspora antillana. Al mapear estos desplazamientos rítmicos y temáticos, el artículo

destaca el papel del chutney como un medio dinámico para la negociación de la identidad poscolonial.

Palabras Clave: Chutney; Maticoor; Hindú; Indo-Caribeño; Trinidad; Guyana

Das Raízes aos Ritmos: O Desenvolvimento e a Diversidade Musical da Música Chutney

Resumo O estilo musical Chutney reflete a experiência indo-caribenha, moldada por uma complexa interação de forças históricas, socioeconômicas e geográficas. Este artigo define o estilo musical e traça sua evolução desde as plantações de açúcar da era da servidão por contrato até sua emergência como um fenômeno diaspórico global. Ao examinar a transição dos ritos tradicionais Maticoor e das raízes devocionais hindus para os hinos contemporâneos de "canções de rum" (*rum song*) e "casas de casamento" (*wedding house*), este estudo posiciona o Chutney como um arquivo sonoro de sobrevivência cultural. Central para essa análise é a sonoridade distintiva do estilo, particularmente o papel da instrumentação tradicional—*dholak, dhantal e harmonium*—ao lado de influências modernas. Por meio de uma análise lírica comparativa, o trabalho explora como o hibridismo musical e o sincretismo permitiram que o Chutney absorvesse elementos de Bollywood, da música Soca e de tradições caribenhas mais amplas. Em última análise, a pesquisa demonstra como processos de intercâmbio transcultural reformularam a identidade indo-caribenha, oferecendo novas perspectivas sobre gênero, etnicidade e sexualidade na diáspora das Índias Ocidentais. Ao mapear essas mudanças rítmicas e temáticas, o texto destaca o papel do Chutney como um meio dinâmico para a negociação da identidade pós-colonial.

Palavras-chave: Chutney; Maticoor; Hindu; Indo-Caribenho; Trinidad; Guiana

Indo-Caribbean North Americans define and interpret chutney music through diverse musical, historical, economic, and social lenses. Described as "hot, spicy, fast beat drumming" and variously as wedding, rum-shop, or Indian music, chutney has evolved into multiple subgenres, including chutney soca, chutney parang, Bhojpuri chutney, chutney reggae, and tassa-driven chutney. Its development reflects factors such as Trinidad's 1935 musical comedy *Bala Joban*, migration, and cultural practices, blending Indo-Caribbean and West Indian influences while preserving Indian heritage. Central to festivals like Trinidad and Tobago Carnival and Toronto Carnival, chutney stands out in the Caribbean for its distinct Indo-Caribbean identity. This paper examines chutney's historical and social contexts, musical features, and evolving styles, drawing on historical sources, musical analysis, and an interview with chutney artist Mukesh Mahabir of the National Indian Orchestra. Understanding chutney's evolution requires first understanding the movements and experiences of Indians and Indo-Caribbean communities.

As Indian and Indo-Caribbean communities migrated globally, their music travelled with them. Today, modern chutney is performed in major cities across North America, the United Kingdom, and beyond. Its subgenres reflect cultural syncretism within the Caribbean, with Trinidad and Guyana leading production, distribution, and innovation due to their large Indo-Caribbean populations. Chutney emerged during the indentureship period (1838–1917), when Indians migrated to the Caribbean following the emancipation of enslaved Africans. Laborers from northern and eastern India endured months-long voyages, often under harsh conditions, with five-year contracts promising wages and basic necessities that were frequently unmet. Return passage to India required additional labour or payment. By the mid-19th century, planters lobbied to replace return passage with land grants of approximately ten acres, citing the high cost of repatriation and the impracticality of investing in laborers only to send them home shortly thereafter (Roopnarine 2009).

Indian indentured labourers brought their musical traditions to the Caribbean, particularly to Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. During the voyage, they performed folk songs, Hindu devotional music, and European sea shanties, and continued singing and dancing after long workdays on the plantations. With a large Muslim population, these gatherings evolved into the Hosay procession. "The first noted observance of Hosay was in 1847 in the streets of San Fernando, in South Trinidad, and there is evidence of Hosay celebrations in Chaguanas and St. James from as far back as 1865" (Ramnarine 2023). Over ten days, labourers marched with tadjahs and tassa drums to commemorate Imam Hussein during Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar), fostering unity. Colonial authorities viewed this solidarity as a threat, violently suppressing the procession on October 30, 1884—an event now known as the Hosay massacre. Despite this, their music, chanting, and tassa drumming traditions endure in chutney music and Indo-Caribbean wedding traditions.

The East Indian community, who came to work as indentured labourers on the plantations, also contributed to the diversity of Trinidad Carnival. Chutney music, tassa drums, and Hindi made an impact on calypso/soca music, inspiring the creation of the chutney soca genre.

Some songs which celebrated Indian culture . . . became mainstream and were embraced across the region. Indian dress has also influenced costume design for masquerade" (Ramsay & Murray, 2024). The development of carnival in Trinidad and Tobago stemmed from the emancipated African community celebrating the Canboulay festival.[1] Carnival, rooted in Afro-Trinidadian Canboulay traditions, evolved into a multicultural festival through twentieth-century contributions from Indian and other communities, including musical fusion and costume design. Indo-Caribbean music gained . . . visibility on parade trucks and later on main stages with the emergence of subgenres like chutney soca and chutney reggae.Soca music, created in 1941, started to gain prominence in Trinidad. Soca is described as a mix of calypso music and traditional Indian rhythms . . . One of the most prominent East Indian developments under this era . . . was the emergence of chutney soca— incorporating secular music from East Indian plantation communities with calypso, suggesting further the integration of Indians into the world of calypso and Carnival. (Bahadoor, 2023). Modern chutney, including chutney soca, evolved from classical roots and is a Carnival staple. It features stepwise, repetitive melodies on harmonium and vocals, with lyrics reflecting Caribbean life or devotional themes. Traditional dholak–dhantaal rhythms are adapted with drum machines, creating the dense, danceable textures that make chutney central to social gatherings. "The rhythmic structure is simple. The taal (cycle of beats) is usually kaherwa (simple quadruple time 4/4)" (Ramnarine 2002, 61). Harmonically, chutney is straightforward, relying on triads around a single key, and "the overall structure of many chutney songs is that of the verse and chorus format" (Ramnarine 2002, 61).

Chutney music is influenced by local classical Indian music,[2] and Hindu devotional Bhajans. This genre is rooted in Indian classical and folk traditions developed within the Indo-Caribbean community, which includes both religious and cultural songs performed at ceremonies, celebrations and gatherings. The difference in names reflects distinct functions, style, and contexts, but are all under the umbrella term "traditional chutney music." Local classical Indian music refers more specifically to the Caribbean adaptation of Indian classical musical practices. It emphasizes traditional melodies, scales and vocal techniques preserved orally within Hindu communities, rather than formal North Indian or South Indian classical systems. Hindu devotional Bhajans are religious songs dedicated to Hindu deities. Their primary purpose is worship and spiritual devotion. Both classical Indian music and devotional Bhajan music have influenced the sound of chutney music.

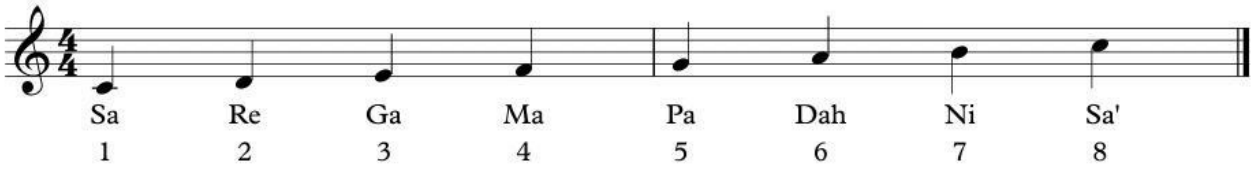
[1] This was a creole carnival tradition rooted in emancipated Africans' celebration of harvest and their freedom. It involved burning sugarcane stalks and parades with drums, tamboo bamboo music, kalinda stick fighting and costumes. Tensions arose in 1881 because colonial authorities tried to suppress the noisy and rowdy celebrations, particularly the drumming, masked dancers and fire. This festival later developed into the festival we now know as Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.
[2] "Local" referencing Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Traditional chutney (80–100 BPM) features dense textures, complex rhythms, and dynamic contours. Taan singing—rapid melodic flourishes and sustained vowels from North Indian classical music—ornaments melodies, giving the genre its Indian character. Women performing at weddings employ a "full-throated" style with a low tessitura, characteristic of South Asian village singing (Myers 2001). Traditionally confined to ritual contexts, this vocal power is extended in the Caribbean diaspora to public performance, amplifying its political resonance. In chutney, women's full-throated singing asserts bodily presence and sexual agency, challenging Indo-Caribbean respectability norms and patriarchal ideals. By combining taan techniques with female vocal expression, chutney bridges Bhojpuri and classical Indian traditions while integrating Caribbean percussion, defining the genre and its subgenres.

Traditional chutney music features vocalists accompanied primarily by harmonium, dholak, and dhantal, with modern subgenres incorporating additional or electronic instruments. These instruments were introduced to the Caribbean by South Asian indentured laborers between 1838 and 1917. The harmonium—originally a European instrument adapted in India by Dwarkanath Ghose—became central due to its portability and capacity for melodic and harmonic support. The dholak, a North Indian double-headed drum, contributes rhythmic patterns rooted in Bhojpuri folk traditions, while the dhantal, derived from estate tools during indentureship, represents a distinctive Indo-Caribbean rhythmic innovation (Maharaj 2011). Chutney draws heavily from Bhojpuri folk music traditions through the dholak while incorporating the dhantal as a uniquely Indo-Caribbean rhythmic innovation.

Chutney and Indian music often use a Hindi adaptation of the Western movable sol-fa scale for pitched instruments. In Hindustani (North Indian classical) music, a lowered note is called komal and is indicated by a solid line below the note or sol-fa syllable, while a raised note is called tivra and marked with a dot above the note or syllable. Showcased below, is a visual representation of the Hindi version of the Western sol-fa scale in C Major.

Figure 1: Hindi Sol-Fa Scale



Traditional chutney lyrics often tell stories or devotional texts about Hindu gods, with the Ramayana and Sita as popular themes. Passed down orally, songs reflect Caribbean life and are performed at cultural celebrations, family ceremonies, and community gatherings in languages like Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, and Bhojpuri. Originally a women-led tradition performed in domestic and devotional spaces, chutney allowed socialization away from the male gaze. Over time, especially in India, Trinidad, Suriname and Guyana during the colonial and post-independence periods, male performers were incorporated to adapt to changing audiences and performance contexts.

Today, chutney music is most prominently performed within Caribbean Hindu weddings and associated pre-wedding rituals. In the days preceding marriage, songs accompany ceremonies such as maticoor or dig dutty night, which involve prayers for the couple and the honouring of Mother Earth, including the Haldi rite, symbolizing fertility, prosperity, and renewal. Musical performance typically consists of drumming and traditional chutney songs, often led by women, whose repertoire includes bawdy and ritual songs that are recognized as precursors to contemporary chutney compositions. Music continues throughout multi-day wedding ceremonies and extends to lifecycle rituals such as chatti and barahi, where women perform sohar songs. In Trinidad and Guyana, these Bhojpuri-derived wedding and birth traditions significantly shaped the development of traditional chutney music.

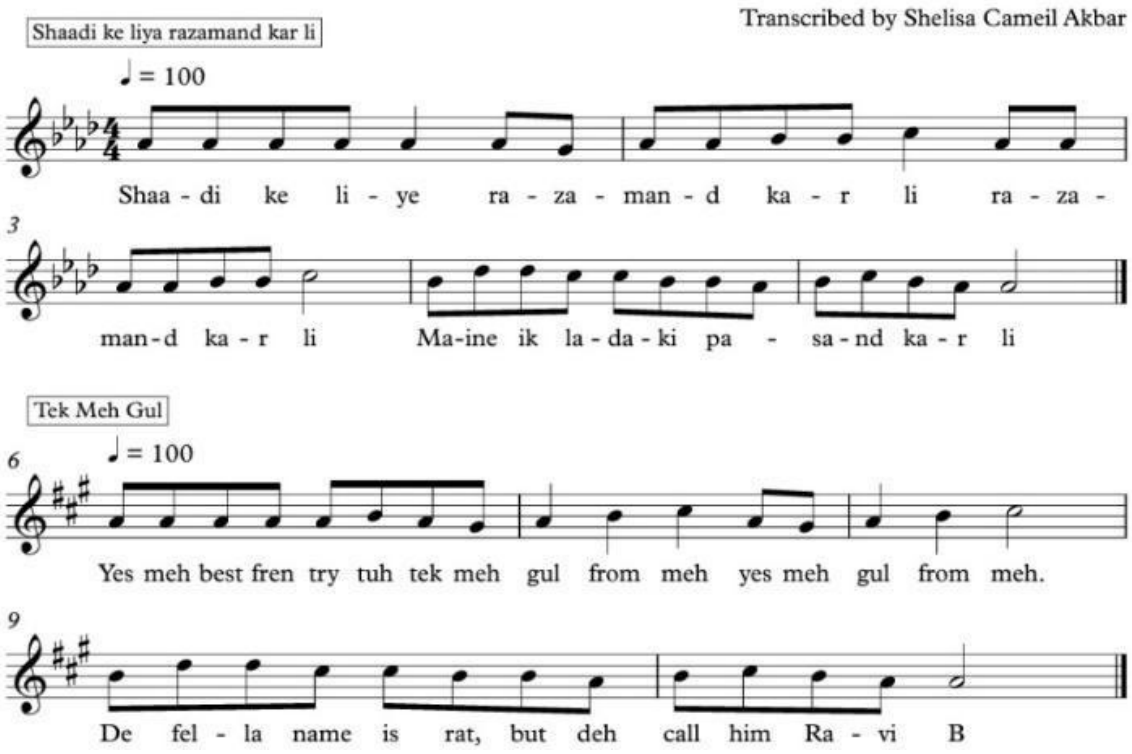
While traditional chutney in Trinidad and Guyana retained its folk foundations, the emergence of chutney soca introduced expanded instrumentation, including synthesizers, brass, drum kits, keyboards, and electric guitars and bass. Contemporary performances may substitute traditional instruments such as the dhantal and dholak with manjira (jaal), tabla, dhol, or tassa, reflecting ongoing stylistic reinvention that has also produced subgenres such as tassa-driven chutney and chutney reggae. Despite these developments, chutney remains governed by established conventions emphasizing fast, danceable rhythms, animated vocals, and memorable refrains, and its dissemination has historically been limited by its primary performance contexts in weddings and live fêtes, resulting in restricted radio airplay largely confined to privately owned Indo-Caribbean stations (Mahabir 2009).

As chutney music became popular within the West Indies, "European and American scholars . . . (who) have categorized this "local classical" music of Trinidad as a corrupted or distorted version of the classical music of India (even taunting it as "tattered rags"), have missed the charm of New World transformation and mistakenly assumed that Trinidadian composers knew of Indian classical music before it hit the Americas in the 1960s" (Myers 2001). In modern chutney music, the inclusion of Bollywood film music and many other Caribbean rhythmic styles, such as soca, tassa drumming and reggae rhythms, are utilized to enhance the sound. Chutney music became a powerful way for Indian settlers to preserve their cultural identity while also celebrating the fusion of cultures within the Caribbean, fostering unity and strengthening inclusive communities; today, it continues to bridge the gap for modern listeners born in the Caribbean but living in North America, connecting them to their roots through sound. Myers notes that, "In 1947, Radio Trinidad (the island's first station) opened, and by September of that year a regular programme of local Indian music was aired. By the 1960s dozens of Indian orchestras played film music arrangements at weddings, parties, and bazaars, on radio and on a weekly television programme" (Myers 2001).

Modern chutney frequently adapts Bollywood melodies while substituting English lyrics that reflect Caribbean social contexts rather than the original narratives. Performed by both male and female artists, these songs often reuse shared riddims with new lyrical or melodic layers. The 1960 Bollywood song "Shaadi Ke Liye Razamand Kar Li" exemplifies narrative-driven

wedding music through Hindustani-influenced vocals and orchestration combining Indian and Western instruments.[3] Indo-Caribbean artists rework these elements in Ravi B and Andy Singh's "Tek Meh Gul" (2012), which incorporates classical-style vocal ornamentation while shifting lyrical themes toward playful Caribbean romance. The song fuses traditional chutney instruments with electronic beats at an upbeat tempo (110 BPM), creating a dance-oriented style that retains Bollywood melodic and rhythmic structures. Its melodic and lyrical relationship to the original is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Chutney and Bollywood Melodic Comparison



The lyrical narratives within modern chutney music were initially stories about the way of life, the family dynamics of the countries within the Caribbean islands. Vocalists such as Sundar Popo, Terry Gajraj, Babla and Kanchan held the lyrical content within their modern chutney music. An example of this lyrical content can be heard in Sundar Popo's song "Mother's Love" (1979). "Mother's Love" is widely popular across the Anglophone Indo-Caribbean world for portraying mothers as the emotional, moral, and economic anchors of the household. The lyrics reflect working-class realities—physical labour, financial struggle, and personal sacrifice—while emphasizing obedience, gratitude, and respect for elders. Sundar Popo's song highlights how chutney music preserves social values, transmits intergenerational memory, and documents lived experience, serving as both cultural expression and social commentary in Trinidad and Guyana. The chorus lyrics are showcased in Figure 3.

[3] The lyrics under the Hindi song "Shaadi Ke Liye Razamand Kar Li" (1960) are an English transliteration of the Hindi pronunciation of the words.

Figure 3: Your Mother's Love

Your mother's love,
should never forget
The wrong things you do child,
You're bound to regret.
— Sundar Popo, *Your Mother's Love*, 1979

As chutney and its subgenres gained popularity among Caribbean diasporic communities, particularly Trinidadian and Guyanese immigrants in North America, the music shifted in language, performers, and content. Lyrics became predominantly English, men came to dominate performances, and themes turned toward parties, gender roles, and social issues such as alcohol, dancing, and infidelity. Aisha Mohammed notes that marriage, sex, and family remain central themes, but chutney soca articulates them differently, serving as "a form of public dialogue on what is and is not acceptable behaviour for women and men" (Mohammed 2007). The shift to male-dominated performance occurred as chutney moved from private, women-centred spaces—weddings, childbirth ceremonies, and domestic gatherings—into public venues like village stages, rum shops, recording studios, radio, and Carnival tents. Colonial and post-colonial patriarchal norms discouraged women from performing publicly, associating public singing and dancing with impropriety, while men pursued commercial opportunities. As a result, women's contributions remained largely informal and undocumented, reflecting broader Indo-Caribbean dynamics in which gender, commercialization, and colonial moral frameworks reshaped cultural expression and public representation of chutney music.

Adesh Samaroo's "Rum Till I Die" (2003) exemplifies chutney's male-dominated turn, highlighting public, alcohol-centred spaces such as rum shops, street fêtes, and Carnival venues—historically masculine performance settings in Trinidad and Guyana. Its lyrics celebrate drinking, endurance, and carefree revelry, reflecting working-class Indo-Caribbean masculinity as chutney moved into commercial and public circuits. This contrasts with earlier songs like Sundar Popo's "Mother's Love," which centre on domestic life, maternal sacrifice, moral guidance, and family responsibilities. While "Mother's Love" situates music in private, women-centred spaces and uses lyrics for emotional reflection and social instruction, "Rum Till I Die" emphasizes leisure, excess, and audience participation. The shift in lyrical themes illustrates how commercialization and public performance reshaped chutney, reinforcing male dominance by privileging masculine experiences and values over women-centred narratives (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rum Till I Die

Rum til I die, Is rum til I die.
She tell meh she don't love me
and that's the reason why.
— Adesh Samaroo, *Rum Till I Die*, 2003

Chutney music and its sub-genres began gaining popularity between the 1960s and 1990s when chutney music was performed and played during Carnival season. The dissemination of the genre strengthened the many sub-genres that already existed on an international level. "The popular hot songs of the 1990s youth culture are chutney, also known as Indian soca (soul plus calypso); they draw on the old local classical repertory and traditional instruments but with a disco beat and accompany drinking and dancing in a nightclub setting" (Myers 2001). Caribbean bands such as National Indian Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago started their band by playing Bollywood film songs in 1967 and then began creating their own modern chutney music in 1969. The leader of the band, Harry Mahabir, studied music in India around the 1940s. Once he returned to Trinidad, he began forming this band which included his son Mukesh Mahabir.

In a phone interview with Mukesh Mahabir on December 1, 2022, valuable insights were gained on the development, migration, and evolution of chutney music. Mukesh explained that percussion is central to chutney, with arrangements created by layering and omitting instruments to make the music cohesive and conversational. Early songs were learned by ear, though later musicians increasingly used recordings and sheet music. Discussing the interplay with Bollywood, he stated: "Yes. In 1967 that band used to play film songs. But then after 1969 we only performed original chutney music. In fact, many Bollywood films borrowed our songs for their productions. Bollywood would borrow from chutney and vice versa. Then, in 1975 we started performing all around the world . . . We started getting these gigs from the promoters distributing the records we made back home. We would use a recording studio in St. James, Port of Spain, called Semp Studios. But some early chutney recordings took place at people's houses. For example, the song by Sundar Popo "Nani Nana" was recorded at my wife's uncle's house" (Mukesh 2022). He concluded by highlighting differences between traditional and modern chutney, including faster tempos and a lyrical shift from everyday life in Trinidad and Tobago to themes of alcoholism and infidelity.

In the 2000s, chutney music evolved into chutney soca, combining traditional instruments like dholak and dhantal with synthesized sounds, including drum kits and horns. This fusion blended Indian melodic structures and Bhojpuri lyrics with Afro-Caribbean soca rhythms and performance aesthetics, appealing to both Indo- and Afro-Caribbean audiences. Situating the music in public spaces such as Carnival, road marches, fetes, and music tents, chutney soca transformed dance into a communal celebration, allowing cross-cultural interaction and challenging traditional social norms. Its popularity in North American diasporic spaces, particularly Toronto's Caribana and other Caribbean festivals, reinforced its role as a cultural mediator. Manuel notes, "Although controversial, chutney soca has become popular among many Creoles as well as Indo-Caribbeans, and its appeal has spread to the Indo-Caribbean communities in North America" (Manuel 2001). Key artists who popularized the genre include Drupatee, who coined the term in 1987, Raymond Ramnarine, Ravi B, Hunter, and Anil Bheem. Today, modern chutney music remains the largest Indian musical contribution to the Caribbean world music scene, heard in major cities like New York City and Toronto.

Considering the musical, economic, historical, social, and gender factors that shaped its evolution, it is evident that the indentured Indian population in the Caribbean successfully preserved and transformed their cultural heritage through chutney music. Although the genre has shifted from its traditional, women-centred roots toward male-dominated, public, and commercial spaces, it continues to retain its Indian melodic, rhythmic, and lyrical foundations. Chutney has developed multiple subgenres, including chutney soca, chutney parang, chutney reggae, and tassa-driven chutney, reflecting the dynamic interplay of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean cultural influences, migration, commercialization, and festival culture. Its popularity remains strong in the Caribbean due to the large Indo-Caribbean population, and has spread internationally to diasporic communities in Toronto, London, and New York, where it fosters cultural identity, unity, and community. Through shared performance spaces, festivals, and musical gatherings, chutney music enables collective celebration, cross-generational connection, and engagement with cultural heritage, even far from the Caribbean. By adapting instrumentation, lyrical themes, and performance style, chutney has remained relevant while promoting social cohesion and communal pride, serving not only as a repository of Indo-Caribbean history but also as a living, unifying, and meaningful musical expression across generations and geographies.

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Shelisa Cameil Akbar is an up-and-coming Canadian vocalist, composer, and educator who is located in the Greater Toronto Area. Her unique sound stems from influences in genres such as Jazz, RnB, Soca, Bollywood, Chutney and Reggae. Her research influences include world music, more specifically related to Caribbean culture and history, gender studies and vocal pedagogy. Shelisa holds a Masters of Arts degree in music composition at York University, and a Bachelor Degree in Music- Voice from Humber College. Shelisa is a certified PYP International Baccalaureate teacher who teaches small group classes and private lessons. Shelisa has recently had the honor to perform at the World of Jazz Music Festival in Brampton, and The Bollywood Monster Mashup Festival hosted in Mississauga.

Artist Statement, “Transference”

Vanessa Godden

I developed a forty minute live performance, Transference, for the 7a*11D International Performance Festival. I was invited by the curatorial collective to produce and perform a new work during the festival in October 2024. The audio recordings collected during the RMG residency were used to construct a sound composition for the performance, Transference, produced in collaboration with Markham-based Visual and Sonic artist, James Knott. Transference encompassed my body traversing between containers of water that gradually shrink as I move between them. I begin inside a rain-water collection barrel, swirling my body through the saltwater that fills the container so the sounds interact with the sound composition. With each movement between containers, my body begins to overtake the surface area of the steel drum and the mixing bowl, displacing the saltwater within. The sounds blend my own field recordings from Trinidad and Tobago, collaboratively constructed experimental steel pan recordings, and a choir of sounds collected from Queer and Trans loved ones between Toronto, Texas (US), and Melbourne (Australia). The performance serves as a bridge between queer and Caribbean lineages.

Vanessa Godden (they, them) is a queer Indo-Caribbean and Euro-Canadian artist, educator, and curator. They are based in Tsí Tkarón:to/Toronto, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, including Mississaugas of the Credit, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Godden’s transdisciplinary practice explores how personal histories and the body in relation to geographic space can be conveyed through oral and somatic storytelling in art. They draw from their multi-ethnic diasporic experiences to build multi-sensory performances, videos, sound installations, book art pieces, and net-art that unfurl the impacts of trauma on the body, connections to community, and tethers to culture. Godden is a sessional lecturer at universities across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. They are also the cofounder of the curatorial collective Diasporic Futurisms. They hold a PhD from the Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne, Australia; 2020), an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (Providence, USA; 2014), and a BFA from the University of Houston (Houston, USA; 2012). Their work has been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at organisations such as Articule in Montreal, The Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery (formerly known as Margaret Lawrence Gallery) in Melbourne, Youkobo Artspace in Tokyo, ClampArt in New York City, and Aurora Picture Show in Houston.

Image credits

Vanessa Godden, Transference, 45 minute live performance, 2024, photography by Henry Chan


FIRE EXTINGUISHER
PEAVEY

On Performance, Family, and Queerness: A Conversation with Vanessa Godden[1]

Camila Salcedo and Vanessa Godden

Vanessa Godden and I met in 2021 during a residency at Trinity Square Video. At the time we connected over our shared Trinidadian ancestry, and our common interests as interdisciplinary artists, in performance and sound. Over the past few years we have grown our friendship through sharing cultural kinship, joining each other in life celebrations, and grievances alike. I really admire Vanessa – not just their art, but the way they show up in the world and in their relationships, always with a smile and fiercely authentic.

This year, Vanessa asked me to participate in a new series of work for their exhibition, Transgressive Passages (October 12, 2024 – December 8, 2024) at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, as a photography subject, for a series focused on queer Caribbean folks, and to submit audio for their most recent performance work Transference, performed during 7a11d* festival in October in Toronto.

The performance is a twenty minute durational work in which they move through a number of vessels filled with salt water, as they decline in size. It is underscored by sound work created by their collaborator, James Knott, which includes sounds of steel drums, field recordings from Trinidad and Tobago, and recordings from their queer and trans chosen and blood family members.

I met with Vanessa on a cloudy day via Zoom. Before we started, they asked if they could eat their yogurt while we talked, to which I answered, "Of course! Honour your body." What follows is a conversation between two friends, speaking to the body, family ties, queerness, and the sea.

Camila Salcedo: How did you find performance art, or how did it find you?

Vanessa Godden: I think that I've always been theatrical. I've always put on performances for people since I was a kid, and my mom enrolled me in dance lessons when I was two. I didn't follow dance lessons very well. I wasn't very good at, you know, sticking to choreography. I always wanted to do my own weird thing. And so performing has always been a part of who I am. A typical Gemini – I like the attention, but there's also something about a body in space. When language fails, that's the tool that I use to speak.

My first introduction to performance art must have been when I went to the Tate Museum when I was 13. I think I saw some documentation of a performance art piece and I was like, this is so weird. When I was doing my Bachelor's of Fine Arts, I took a feminist course on feminist art from the 1970s to more contemporary work in 2011. Seeing some of the things that I was already

[1] Originally published as Salcedo, Camila, and Vanessa Godden. n.d. "On Performance, Family, and Queerness: A Conversation with Vanessa Godden." *The Ex-Puritan Magazine*. https://ex-puritan.ca/double-issue-66-67

utilizing in my photography process and my video process through the use of my body but removing the camera lens, was that 'aha' moment. A lot of the things that I was speaking about, the tools I was using, and that basis of activism that a lot of performance art had, it made me change my 13 year old mind about what performance art is and what it could be.

CS: I wonder too if performance is like a way to almost cope or kind of "work through" the body? As we know, trauma stored in the body, and I know you've created work that responds to various like forms of trauma. With seeing your most recent performance, something that I was wondering is what you were feeling as you were performing? Sometimes when I perform I experience dissociation from my body, within that moment of being perceived. As I was observing you, I was really wondering what was going on in your body, like somatically? What were you feeling, in that moment, in that space?

VG: For most of the performances there are marks that I hit. In that particular performance, because it was so specifically timed to the composition that James created, I was really thinking about timing. After doing it live for the first time, the work is about temporality. My brain being so focused on time and timing, during that performance, my body almost didn't even register actions. It just was thinking about time, how can I move through this space efficiently according to the timing that's been provided to me?

The performance itself hurts a lot in a lot of sections. It's very uncomfortable. I am feeling the things in my body, but having something else to focus on so intently helps me lean into the pain of those actions because those are the moments where the gesture really speaks about an experience that I have about how I move through the world. While the piece is about joy and care and love and finding resilience, it is also about the pain of being a queer person in this world. Leaning into the pain is like speaking about how all of this can exist alongside one another.

I probably do dissociate a little bit from these performances because I have to take my glasses off. And, you know me, I'm a smiley person. I'm goofy. And so I become a vessel for something else, and how can you not leave your body a little bit here and there as it's happening?

CS: There's something beautiful in not only your intent behind the work, but also what it may cause for you in that experience of like, even though you are in pain, what's carrying you through are the voices of your friends and your friend James' recordings. In your past work you've often included your family members, and with this piece you're including your chosen family as well. Could you speak to the people that you chose to include in this work, and what that means to you?

VG: My family and friends' voices are in the recordings. I was thinking about how there is a relationship there. I am talking about the tension between needing a chosen family when your family that you grew up with, that helped to raise you, sometimes aren't the most accepting.

When I was younger, my auntie Zin and my mom and my dad and my uncle may not have been the most generous towards queer folks. As I've grown into adulthood and been more open about my gender and my sexuality. They have been trying. My auntie Zin, one of the most heavily featured voices, has been one of the most staunch advocates for me. I really appreciate her, and I love her for being 74 years old and trying at this age, you know? I have worked with my chosen family before, but it's been a really long time since I've worked with them. What we've collaborated on together has mostly been about experiences of trauma, with a heavy focus on the suffering of our bodies moving through this world. A shift really came from coming out of my PhD and

realizing the hypocrisy of it all – this expectation that marginalized bodies need to showcase, produce, and have their pain be consumed by a wider audience in order for them to be taken seriously. My whole career was built on this because that was what I was taught. I'm acknowledging the flaws and the ways that education, arts education specifically, has done me and my peers a disservice.

The residency that I did at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery was an opportunity for me to think about how I can refocus. And through that, it meant asking people to think about their resilience, and asking myself to think about my own resilience. That starts with the people that are meaningful in my life. I wouldn't be where I am today without them. I reached out to almost everyone that I know, even people that I hadn't stayed in touch with over the years, because I was remembering my formative years.

I've been out as bisexual since I was 16, and then I started dating predominantly cis men. I was in a relationship for many years in my 20s, where I was read as straight and just went with it, because it was Texas in the early 2000s. But I do remember all the people around me at that time, when I was in art school, that were really inspiring to me, and how grateful I was to have them around as folks to look up to. Being queer in Houston was hard, and there were quite a few folks that were out, and not hiding like I was.

They were also queer in ways that we think are new in this day – expressions or discussions of gender and sexuality that don't revolve around this heteronormative perception of how you're supposed to be in a queer relationship. This idea that even if you are gay or a lesbian, you still have to fulfill these roles and replicate heteronormative systems of relationship building – but these folks weren't doing that. I was always in awe of them.

They were the ones that gave me resilience and modeled the ability to move forward in my queerness, to be open and find joy in it. It also gave me the push, following my PhD, to explore my gender, and feel more comfortable with the reality that I am not a woman. I also reached out, of course, to the people that I love dearly and I'm growing to love, because I'm in a new relationship. And I reached out to people that just inspired me as I was learning about the world.

CS: I think your piece speaks to queerness in so many different ways. Oftentimes I feel like as queer folks like we are teachers for a lot of our family members – it's almost our inherent role to represent freedom in the ways that your friends did for you also.

I was wondering too about the elements that you chose to use for this piece. In a lot of your work, there's a lot of chewing, digestion, or mastication of natural elements like flour and curry powder. In *Transference* that element also comes in where you're biting around a bowl and trying to fit in these vessels and containers. I was really moved by the element of water. I'm wondering how you arrived at this material.

VG: I've been reading a lot more and engaging a lot more with a lot of Caribbean diasporic art and thinking about salt water as a metaphor. Not for this idea of longing for belonging, but as this vessel for movement, because it is the thing that has transported us across so many continents. Salt water just felt like a natural material to work with.

There was talk at the beginning of putting some of the materials that I have used in other

performances, like curry powder and chili powder, but I just really enjoyed working with salt water. In Toronto, you have access to lakes, and they're fine, but it's not the same as the sea, you know?

CS: No, it's not.

VG: I just miss the salty water of the sea. There's a specific kind of feeling of home that I get when I'm in that water.

CS: It's interesting to think of seawater as this comforting, home, almost healing element – at least it is to me, but it's also dangerous. It was cool to see you work with that element. I think it was very natural and it made sense to me. What was the result for you at the end of the piece?
How did you feel after?

VG: Well, I had been rehearsing before and that was the first time that I got the timing perfect. When I first finished, I think I was kind of in shock. The reflection on what happened during the performance is always hard to put into words. What I am noticing about my own feelings about the work is that it turned out to be much more melancholy and somber than I was intending it to be.

I think that's just part of my own working through how to focus and prioritize joy. It's hard to not have those same trappings that I was trained in come through. As I continue to develop my practice and grow out of these tropes, I'm hoping that I'll be able to use strategies that can still impact the audience and generate an effective response in them that doesn't rely on struggle. This heaviness is there, of course, but the entire intent behind all of it is joy. I know that this might sound a little bit cheesy but, love. I've got so much love here for all these folks and also for myself.

CS: I love you.

VG: I love you too.

CS: I do want to ask about sound. You worked closely with James on the sound piece, and as you were describing, it was the marker of time and this work. I'm curious about what role sound has in your everyday life.

VG: I'm neurodivergent, so sound plays an immense role in how I am able to move through this world comfortably. I get triggered easily by sound and I have specific sounds that help soothe, but generally I like quiet. So this work, which is so loud and chaotic, is interesting to me – the sounds that would cause chaos in my everyday life are the sounds of banging that myself, Manolo (friend and colleague), and James were making on the steel pans. They were a source of anxiety when I was hearing the composition, but the sounds of people's voices are often soothing to me.

I really appreciate that James took the initiative to highlight and focus on the sounds of voices in different ways and through different textures too. I gave people the prompts of laughing and breathing and reciting texts, but the way that she was able to think about pacing in the composition made it feel like a reflection of my experience in this life. These ups and downs of not just sound, but anxieties, and then comfort and sadness and joy. I am contradictory in that I love, love, love Soca music so much – it's so loud, but it's in this format that feels so familiar. Sound really is something that helps me ground myself, and it is something that can spark memories so quickly, good or bad. It's just a really interesting material.

CS: As your friend, it's an honor to witness you work through those pulls of opposites, like comfort and discomfort, and also finding the pockets where you do feel that freedom. I think the work was very successful and I'm glad I got to talk to you more about it, thank you.

VG: Thanks for being a part of the project. It really meant a lot.

CS: I'm so grateful.

Saving Calypso with Toronto's Kaiso Street Society[1]

Gloria Blizzard

"Calypso is the most important music in the world,"

says musician Jesse Ryan of the music originating in the twin island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. We talk via screens as I interview him for this article. We are both in Toronto, and share common origins and ideas. We agree that calypso shares an ancestral musical and cultural thread with all diasporic cultures that originated in Africa and spread throughout the world – to Cuba, to the French- and English-speaking Caribbean and to Brazil – via the chattel slavery system. We both recognize that calypso as a form, speaks to and about power, culture, social dynamics and the evolution of a people. Ryan surprises me however when he says, "Because of its sheer popularity between the 40s and the 70s, it deeply influenced other forms; in the U.S. in the 50s and 60s, it rivalled rock 'n' roll. Every club had regular calypso-themed events."

> *I said calypso sweeping the place like if she come outta space*
> *My, my calypso sweeping the place like if she come outta space*
> *I can remember rock and roll had the whole place under control*
> *Since calypso leave Trinidad rock and roll really suffering bad*
> — The Mighty Sparrow, *No More Rocking and Rolling* (1958)

Origins

"It is an important political music and culture of music because it came out of a people who did not have one identity ... it became the expression of the collective identity for people of Trin-Tobago," Ryan says. Between the 1400s and 1800s the two islands changed hands many times as different industries caught Western Europe's attention. Initially, the Indigenous Taino population were forced to dive for pearls and then dig for gold. When European interest turned toward the more lucrative sugar, the Dutch brought enslaved Africans to the island and built six sugar factories. The French soon followed with both free and enslaved people and then the Spanish arrived. Eventually the British took over. At certain points there were Indigenous Taino (formerly referred to as Carib), a few Dutch and a French-speaking majority, all living under Spanish law. The islands were eventually taken over by the British.

"Calypso comes out of all that. The tyranny of chattel slavery of Africans kidnapped and brought to the islands to manpower the industry and colonial rule. That's the environment that led to the formation of calypso. In addition, there's other history that comes later on with the arrival of the indentured Indian and Chinese populations. With calypso, there's also the South American influence that came through Venezuela."

Calypsonians sing under cover of a sobriquet. In the documentary *Calypso Dreams*, calypsonian and academic, the Mighty Chalkdust explains, "Calypso is a poor man's newspaper, the people's spokesman, let de people know what time it is, what going on behind they back."

[1] Originally published as Blizzard, Gloria. 2024. "Saving Calypso." The WholeNote. June 12, 2024. https://www.thewholenote.com/index.php/newsroom/feature-stories/33494-saving-calypso. Reprinted with permission of author.

However, "it's not the singer saying, it is the title. Like a colonial judge in an English wig who give a sentence, makes a proclamation – it is the wig doing it, not the man." Mighty Sparrow, Atilla the Hun, Lord Blakie, Lord Melody and Sir Lancelot can say what an ordinary person cannot.

Music and Identity

Every Sunday, both in Trinidad and here in Canada, in the family home with my parents and brothers, the house was filled with the sounds of music – all day. My father had primary access to the record or compact disc or cassette player – whatever the thing with the speakers attached at the time. He often played calypso for hours.

I gathered its importance, not just by how much aural space it took up in the home, but by the fact that my otherwise very busy father would, with sheer delight, happily explain the lyrics to me. He would deconstruct the political commentary, the sexual innuendo, the economic and social and cultural histories and the clever turns of phrase. He explained the impact of the American military base on the island in the lyrics of *Rum* and *Coca Cola* by Lord Invader (with melody by Venezuelan composer Lionel Belasco). He explained what happened when they left in Sparrow's song *Jean and Dinah*.

He was always amazed and so proud and would delight at the cleverness and truths nestled within "Dan is the man in the van," as Sparrow sings on the uselessness of colonial education that taught people on the island nothing of their own history. "It make me a stupidy," he sang. My father would grin gleefully at Lord Blakie's raucous laugh, following a particularly scandalous insight. He showed me what calypsonian David Rudder said in the documentary *Calypso Dreams*, "the laugh fools people, under the laugh is a blade." My father's greatest legacy to me, is the love and appreciation for this art form.

Women calypsonians joined in later on in this predominantly male-originated field. Calypso Rose and others eventually gave some clever, funny, joyful, insights on politics and culture, as well as some discerning licks back to the men. Traditional calypso has often been a way through suffering, sometimes cutting, sometimes light, ironic and gleeful. And yes, sometimes, it's all fun and games.

"Fire fire in she wire wire, ay yai yai, oi oi oi" sang my little brother, still a toddler, joyfully one Sunday morning in church. The family was busy sitting and standing, chanting and then singing as is common in the Catholic mass. That moment we all stood and at this new opportunity to sing, he joined in in full voice with this familiar refrain. "Fire fire in she wire wire," from the Queen of Calypso herself.

Global dialogues

Britain positioned itself as the mother country for colonial subjects and then was somewhat surprised when said subjects showed up on her shores, looking for new life opportunities.
"London is the place for me," sang Lord Kitchener smiling for the reporters and cameras who were there to meet him as he disembarked *SS Empire* in 1948.

London would go on to become a centre for the form. Traditional calypso as Ryan prefers to call it, (or ole time calypso, a Trini might say), contains embedded social commentary, clever turns of phrase and, amongst the chipping and the intoxicating sing-along melodies and rhythms, sophisticated solos and arrangements. In London, Lord Kitchener and others, made recordings with some of the best jazz musicians of the day.

However, even while recording and performing, Lord Kitchener became disenchanted by the struggle with racism in Britain and wrote,

So boys, if you brown they say you can stick around
If you white, well everything's alright
If your skin is dark, no use to try
You got to suffer until you die.

With this new positioning, "Kitch" as he was affectionately known, was also singing "Africa My Home," as Caribbean people and people within the pan-African movement dug into histories beyond the imposed colonial ones.

I want to come back home, gyal I tired roam

The Mighty Dollar

Some of the best-known calypso artists are not the originators of calypso at all. Gloria written by the Mighty Bomber, Ryan's grandfather, was on the American musician Harry Belafonte's first album, which sold a million copies. The Mighty Bomber and many other calypsonians felt unrecognized or improperly compensated for their compositions.

When infuriated originators went to New York to get some recourse, despite the commercial worth and cultural influence of their work they were rarely successful. It was a complex scenario in that they also had to listen as their sound, commentary and turns of phrase were turned into something lighter – "brandy mixed with water," sang Chalkdust in *Misconceptions*, referring to North American versions of calypso. The sordid boon is that the form became well-known far beyond the borders of the tiny twin island nation due to these recordings. Still, there are many absent narratives around calypso, many disappeared artists, composers, many lost or barely remembered works.

Toronto and the Kaiso Street Society

Toronto became another calypso hub, when in the 1950s immigration opened up in Canada and people from the Caribbean travelled to Canada. The Caribana annual parade, instituted by Trinidadians in the city, fashioned itself after the festivities in their homeland. The Mighty Bomber was commissioned to write a calypso for Expo 67. Calypso also had a significant presence in Montreal where Lord Caressa worked for a couple years with the CBC as a broadcaster, and where the Carifête celebration soon became established.

Toronto is also the location of the Kaiso Street Society – a group that includes Deborah Maitland, Aurora Banjath, Natasia Morris and Kadijah Simpson. Founded and directed by Jesse Ryan, it has a mandate to investigate, and honour, document, promote and educate around traditional Calypso to ensure it is preserved and holds its place in the global musical lexicon.

"One of the reasons why I'm so passionate about this is that I really think that traditional calypso is one of the most important musics ever created," says Ryan. The group is ensuring the original art form has its historical place in modern music. The initiative is in part inspired by Ryan's questioning why he grew up not knowing about calypso's deep connection to jazz, or why he did did not know much about Frankie Francis who recorded several jazz-infused albums including one with the RCA All Stars Orchestra in 1964, or why the great album,

Doctor Kitch recorded by Lord Kitchener in 1963, featuring brilliant horn arrangements and improvised solos, is still not more broadly known.

> "I think [it is] actually one of the only forms of music that documents its own history," says Ryan.
>
> *They mean to license we mouth, they don't want we talk*
> — King Radio, *Sedition Law* (1940)

"At the time, anything the British considered to be lewd or anything that invited people to scrutinize British law were deemed seditious and both were illegal," says Ryan. This calypso, commenting on the times, was ironically banned. Calypso was a space for thinking, communicating, commenting and reminding people of themselves in environments that would obliterate them.

Rock back

With a focus on the four global hubs of calypso – Trinidad and Tobago, London, New York and Toronto – the Kaiso Street Society documents where the music has thrived, influenced and created cultural evolutions. As the group brings into the light the imagination, memory and spirit of resistance embodied in the music, it reframes calypso as music for social change.
Kaiso aims to research, archive, share and teach the histories, legacies, the deep cross pollination globally that has taken place during the last 200 years, highlighting global connections and impact. In the works are plans to continue research, host workshops, create listening libraries, and a tour, in 2025, of the Kaiso Street Collective, an ensemble, made up of some of Toronto's best improvisers and composers.

Every music has its pop genre, and soca has elements of the traditional form; however it rarely shares traditional calypso's musical gravitas, social and political commentary, or its clever turns of phrase. From early Superblue's joyful *What's the time mister wolf, bacchanal time!* to the infectious 2018, Afrobeats-influenced Year for Love by Voice, to the 2024 winning road march, Mical Teja's DNA - "*han' up in the air, madness everywhere, it in we DNA ... we in de road way, tell dem freedom in we dna*", soca's fast tempos and simple lyrics are what we will now hear at the annual parade on Toronto's streets. "Soca can take care of itself," says Ryan. It does not need saving.

Remembering calypso's legacy is part of Kaiso's vision. Within the unique musical contribution of traditional calypso is a powerful living history. And in the spirit of Lord Relator's PSA *Sip and Chat* on responsible drinking – "if you can't do it, don' bother come drink my rum" – as we move close to Toronto Caribbean Carnival and jump up to the sounds of soca, let's remember to look backwards and inwards to the original music. Let's listen to de ole time calypso and remember the great masters and mistresses of the form.

Gloria Blizzard writes on music, dance, culture and is the author of *Black Cake, Turtle Soup, and Other Dilemmas*.

Rojo is the Colour of Memory

Sebastián Oreamuno

Abstract "Rojo is the Colour of Memory" is a multi-media project about my immigration experience and my identity as a 1.5 generation Chilean immigrant to Canada through the colours red and rojo (the Spanish word for "red"). In this project, I focus on a memory: encountering the colour "red" when I was eight and had just moved to Canada, and the disorientation of that experience. For me, red did not look like rojo: red was more pinkish in hue and rojo, more orangey. Rojo is what I had grown up with in Chile. It had been my favourite colour. But red was not rojo, and that was a confusing and enlightening insight. Through these colours, this project explores the bodily shiftings that occur in the context of im/migration, and what gets lost in translation, which is not necessarily always a linguistic loss. Red and rojo is composed of 77 abstract drawings and written fragments that return to that memory to recuperate and rediscover. This project has been grounding and has allowed me to understand my in-between identity, which emerges between two cultural horizons.

Keywords: red, memory, in-between identity

Rojo es el Color de la Memoria

Resumen "**Rojo es el color de la memoria**" es un proyecto en multimedia sobre mi experiencia migratoria y mi identidad como inmigrante chileno de generación 1.5 en Canadá, articulado a través de los colores *red* y *rojo*. En este proyecto, me centro en un recuerdo: el encuentro con el color *rojo* cuando tenía ocho años y acababa de mudarme a Canadá, y la desorientación que produjo esa experiencia. Para mí, *red* no se veía como *rojo*: red tenía un matiz más rosado y rojo, uno más anaranjado. *Rojo* era el color con el que había crecido en Chile. Había sido mi color favorito. Pero *red* no era *rojo*, y esa fue una revelación tan confusa como esclarecedora. A través de estos colores, el proyecto explora los desplazamientos corporales que ocurren en el contexto de la im/migración y aquello que se pierde en la traducción, lo cual no siempre constituye una pérdida lingüística. *Red* y *rojo* está compuesto por 77 dibujos abstractos y fragmentos escritos que regresan a ese recuerdo para recuperarlo y redescubrirlo. Este proyecto ha sido una experiencia de arraigo y me ha permitido comprender mi identidad del "entre", que emerge entre dos horizontes culturales.

Palabras Clave: rojo; memoria; identidad liminal

Rojo é a Cor da Memória

Resumo Rojo é a Cor da Memória" é um projeto multimídia sobre a minha experiência de imigração e minha identidade como imigrante de geração 1.5 do Chile para o Canadá por meio das cores *red* e *rojo* (vermelho em inglês e espanhol). Neste projeto, concentro-me em uma memória: o encontro com a cor red quando eu tinha oito anos e havia acabado de me mudar para o Canadá, e a desorientação dessa experiência. Para mim, red não se parecia com *rojo*: *red* tinha um tom mais rosado e *rojo*, mais alaranjado. *Rojo* foi a cor com a qual cresci no Chile. Tinha sido a minha cor favorita. Mas red não era *rojo*, e essa foi uma percepção confusa e reveladora. Com essas cores, esse projeto explora os deslocamentos corporais que ocorrem no contexto da i/migração, e o que se perde com a tradução, que não é necessariamente sempre uma perda linguística. O projeto *red* e *rojo* é composto de 77 desenhos abstratos e fragmentos escritos que retornam àquela memória com o intuito de recuperar e redescobrir. Este trabalho tem me ancorado e me permitido compreender minha identidade híbrida, de entrelugar, que emerge entre dois horizontes culturais.

Palavras-chave: vermelho; memória; identidade híbrida

Sebastián Oreamuno is a queer, disabled artist-academic who was born in Santiago, Chile, on Mapuche territory. I grew up on Sḵwx̱wú7mesh territory and I'm currently based in Tkarón:to, which has been care-taken by many First Nations, including the present treaty holders the Mississaguas of the Credit. I'm grateful to (study) dance on this land and to be completing a doctorate on the relationship between movement and memory with a focus on cueca, the Chilean national dance.

"Rojo is the colour of memory" is inspired by my immigration experience and my identity as a 1.5-generation Chilean immigrant to Canada through the colours red and rojo (the Spanish word for "red"). This project focusses on a specific memory: encountering the colour "red" when I was eight years old and had just moved to Canada, and the disorientation of that experience. For me, red did not look like rojo: red was more pinkish in hue and rojo, more orangey. Rojo is what I had grown up with in Chile. It had been my favourite colour. But red was not rojo. Through rojo and red, I attend to the bodily shifting that occurs in the context of im/migration; as well as what gets lost in translation, which is not necessarily always a linguistic loss. The collages and poems that follow are informed by 77 drawings and written fragments that return to that memory—a practice that allowed me to recuperate and re(dis)cover.

The poems and collages signal the performance of an in-between migrant identity. Technically, I am considered a 1.5-generation migrant: I immigrated with my parents but as a child. This means that I had little choice in the matter and likely had no understanding of what was to come. As a 1.5-generation immigrant, I grew up between two or more cultural horizons. My in-between identity emerges in "the borderlands," as Gloria Anzaldúa[1] (1987) called that place, space and the circumstances that induce movement through negotiation; circumstances through which one is continually emerging as the negotiations change and the borderlands shift.

The first collage, "rojo used to be my favourite colour," situates me in Chile as a child, where my senses were first shaped through reading, writing, colouring, math and familial gatherings. The ribbon that weaves around me is rojo, the colour that tethers me to and reminds me of Chile; and the medallion that it holds has the emblem of the Catholic all-boys' school I attended while I lived there, Notre Dame. This is where my migrant journey began.

The second image, "migrant mathematics: rojo ≠ red," relates to that "strange encounter" with red, once I arrived in Canada. Sara Ahmed[2] (2000) asks that we attend to the surprise in strange encounters and allow those surprises to take us on journeys. The difference in hue between red and rojo in this collage speaks to that surprise; however, together the crayons are colouring an emergent subject with tentacular reach, a being not yet figured. There may be loss here, but there isn't negation, only multiplicity.

Unlike the second image, the third collage focusses on a central figure: the apple—that fruit that has been associated with knowledge in the Judeo-Christian tradition. C. Nadia Seremetakis[3] (1994) asserts that the senses, those faculties that help us perceive and make sense of the world, emerge from within cultural contexts. "Pinta la manzana roja/colour the the apple red", a pedagogical instruction, illustrates how my sensorium, how I encounter the world, has been shaped by Chile and Canada.

The final collage returns to me as an adult: a 1.5-generation immigrant, the child of contradictions that understands and perceives with mixed senses, sitting in between two (or more) worlds. I have resisted calling myself Chilean-Canadian, a hyphenated identity. It feels too neat, too uncomplicated, too static... I prefer to think of myself as a node—the hyphen, that sign that links and connects, that space—emerging with and within. This is the in-between migrant identity I perform and why I am "proudly in between."

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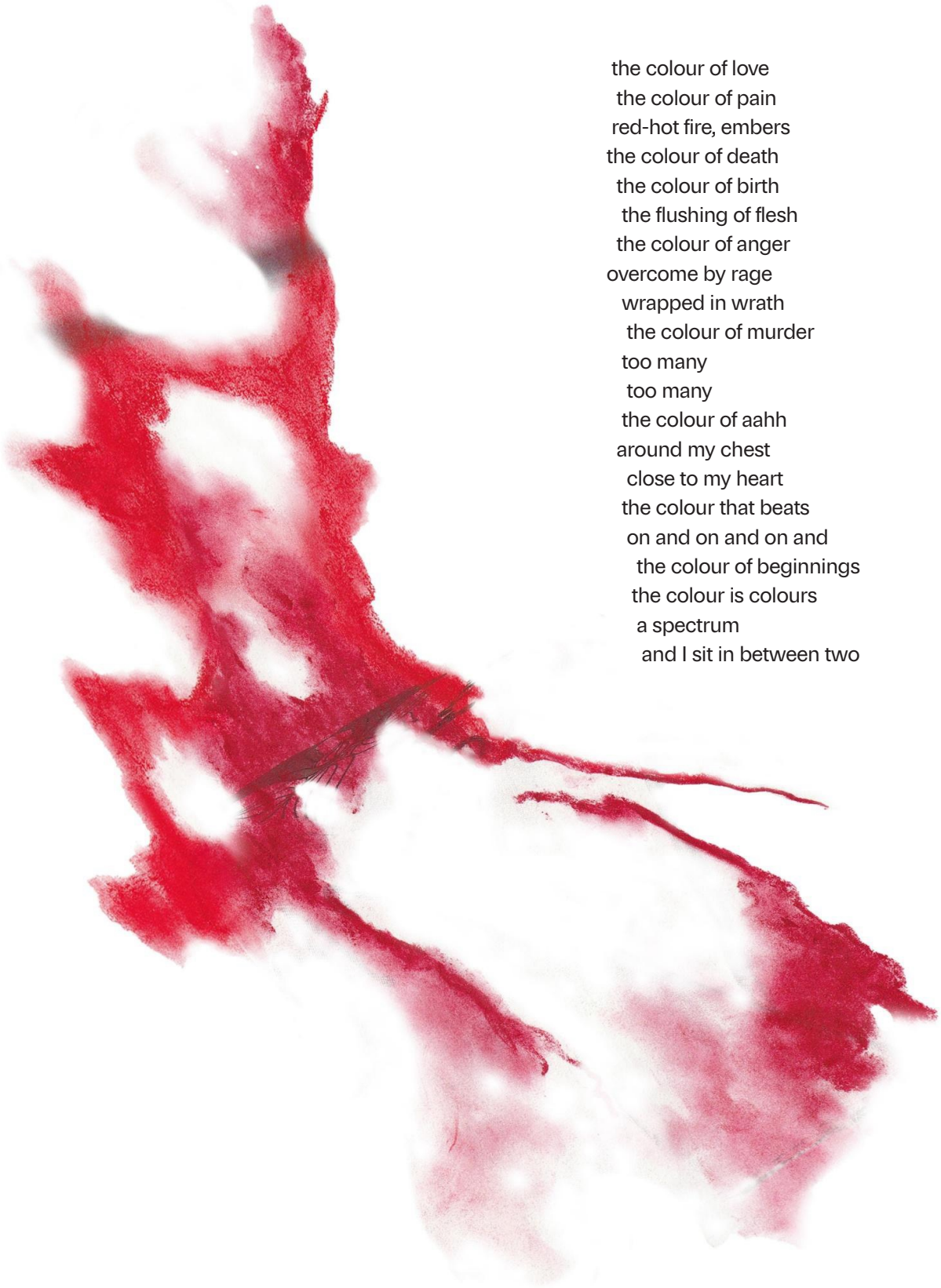
[1] Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books

[2] Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge

[3] Seremetakis, C. Nadia, 1994. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity Chicago*: The University of Chicago Press

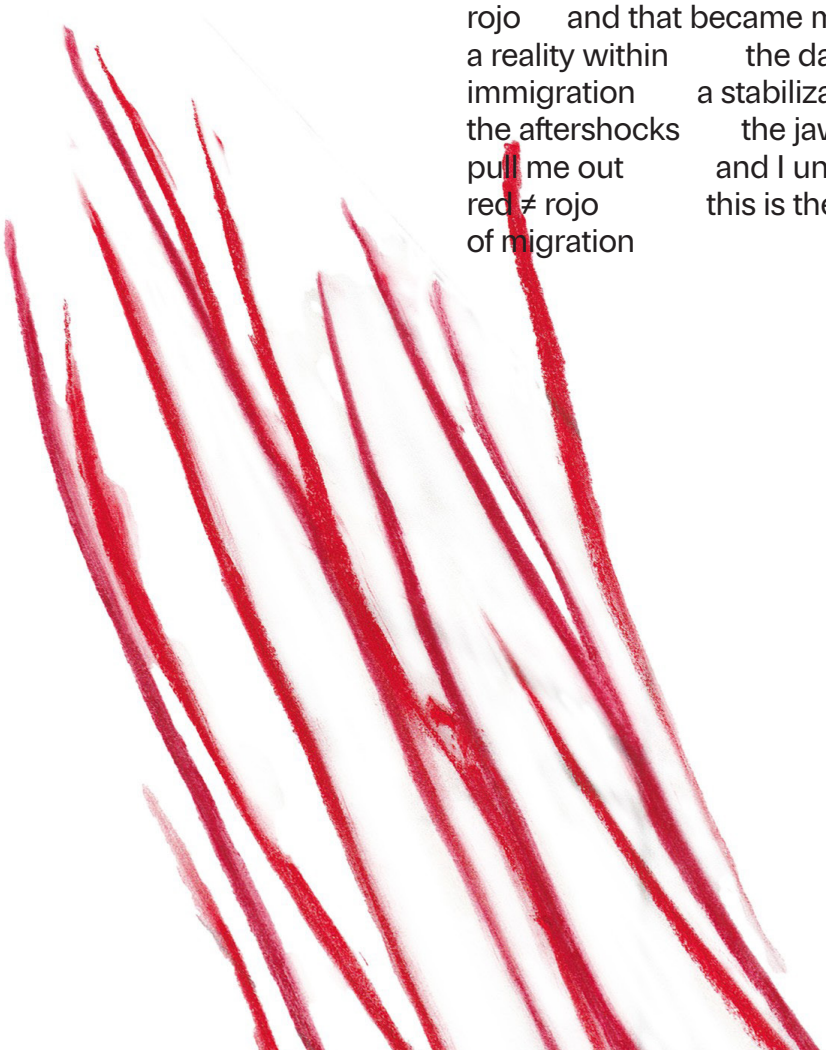


the colour of love
the colour of pain
red-hot fire, embers
the colour of death
the colour of birth
the flushing of flesh
the colour of anger
overcome by rage
wrapped in wrath
the colour of murder
too many
too many
the colour of aahh
around my chest
close to my heart
the colour that beats
on and on and on and
the colour of beginnings
the colour is colours
a spectrum
and I sit in between two

rojo used to be my favourite colour

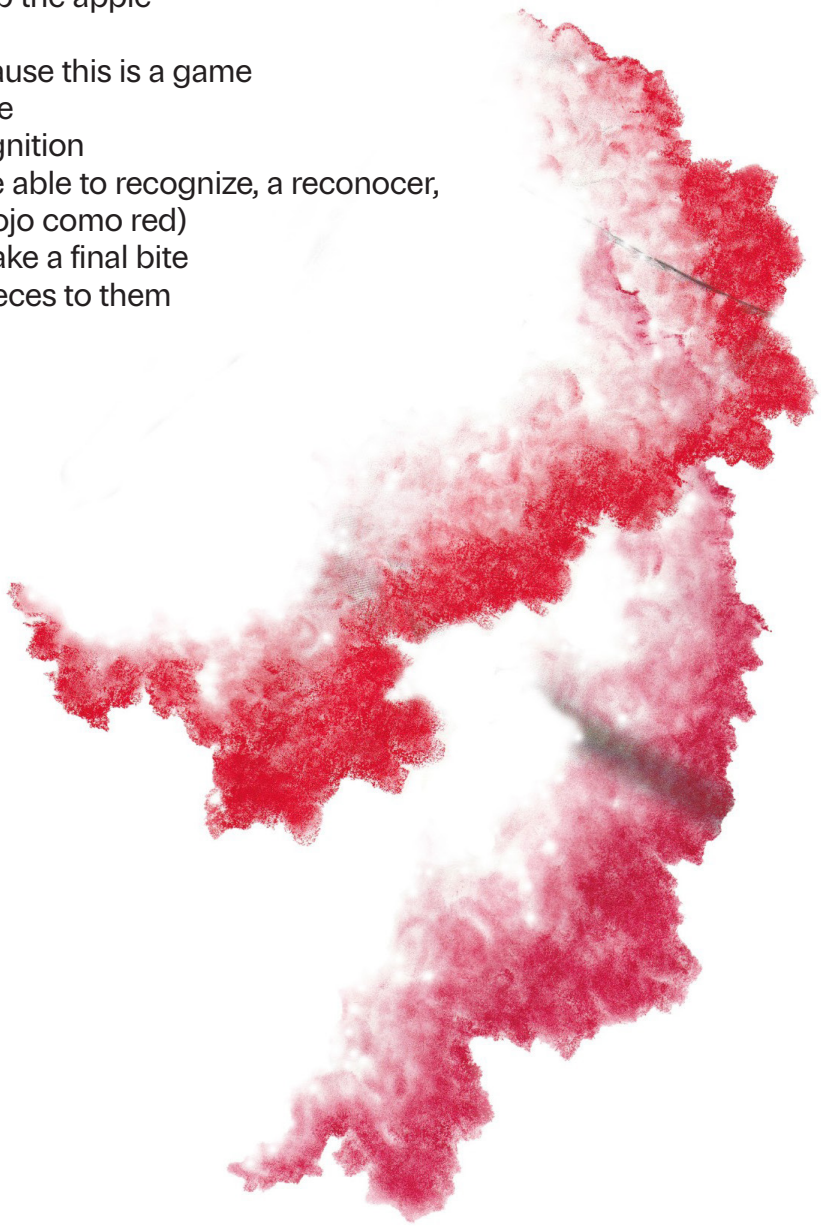
migrant mathematics: rojo ≠ red

there are claws but also sometimes it feels
like a dream how could my senses sense
a difference? how could my senses
become disoriented? it's as if I had to go
through that disorientation to re-orient
myself to ground myself in a
different certainty the equation was
broken red was not the same as
rojo and that became my new reality
a reality within the daze of
immigration a stabilization following
the aftershocks the jaws of life
pull me out and I understand
red ≠ rojo this is the mathematics
of migration



pinta la manzana roja / colour the apple red

I colour inside and outside the borders of the apple
the red apple, la manzana roja
la pinto roja, red
then I take a bite and leave that piece to the side
I'm asked to colour the apple with red
pinto la manzana con el color rojo como me han enseñado
they've taught me this, they've taught me this colour's name
the apples are not to blame but I take another bite
they never asked to be painted red, I take another bite
I leave the pieces on the side
sigo pintando la manzana roja pero me salgo de las lineas
the lines, the borders, make up the apple
the red, el rojo, le da color
I take another bite because this is a game
I put the piece to the side
this is a game of recognition
and I'm supposed to be able to recognize, a reconocer,
red as rojo (and rojo como red)
I lose and I take a final bite
I give the pieces to them



proudly in between

por que era rojo mi
color preferido?
el color del
copihue
el color de la
bandera
el color de Notre
Dame, our lady
el color del
Comunismo
el color que
traje a Canadá
the colour I held
in my body
rojo
was met by another
red
the colour of the
maple leaf
the colour of
the flag
the colour of
McDonalds, Coca-
Cola, the Liberals
and Garibaldi
Highlands
el color de los
desaparecidos
the colour of the
missing and murdered
colours change but
aren't replaced
stripped of rojo but
with red and rojo
stripes

Big Speech, Small Island: Tobago's Speech Band in Spoken Word and Oral Traditions[1]

amílcar peter sanatan

Abstract The Speech Band in Tobago is a popular folk, theatrical and oratory art form performed in community-based events, cultural competitions and heritage festivals. However, the art form has been critically omitted from scholarship on the genealogy of contemporary Caribbean spoken word. Despite its significance in the cultural production of Tobagonian identities, the Speech Band suffers from epistemic neglect within Caribbean Studies dominated by Trinidadian narratives and print-centric literary standards. In this discussion, I combine archival research conducted at national heritage libraries in both Trinidad and Tobago and semi-structured interviews with cultural practitioners and organisers. I argue that the invisibilization of the Speech Band is symptomatic of a double marginality: the uneven political and cultural dynamics between the twin islands and the peripheralizing of oral traditions within the Caribbean literary canon.

Keywords: Tobago, Speech Band, spoken word, oral traditions

Gran Discurso, Isla Pequeña: La *Speech* Band de Tobago en Poesía Oral y Las tradiciones Orales

Resumen La Speech Band en Tobago constituye una forma artística popular de carácter folclórico, de teatro y oratoria que se presenta en eventos comunitarios, certámenes culturales y festivales de patrimoniales. No obstante, dicha práctica ha sido significativamente excluida de los estudios académicos dedicados a la genealogía de la palabra hablada contemporánea en el Caribe. A pesar de su papel fundamental en la producción cultural y la articulación de identidades tobagonianas, la Speech Band padece una forma de negligencia epistémica dentro de los Estudios Caribeños, campo que continúa dominado por narrativas trinitenses y por parámetros literarios anclados en la primacía del texto escrito. En este análisis, integro investigación archivística llevada a cabo en bibliotecas nacionales de patrimonio tanto en Trinidad como en Tobago, junto con entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas a practicantes culturales y organizadores. Sostengo que la persistente invisibilización de la Speech Band es indicativa de una doble marginalidad: por un lado, las dinámicas políticas y culturales asimétricas entre las islas gemelas; y por otro, la relegación de las tradiciones orales dentro del canon literario caribeño.

Palabras Clave: Tobago; Speech Band; spoken word; tradiciones orales

[1] A version of this paper was first presented at the Society for Caribbean Studies (UK) Postgraduate Conference, April 10-11, 2025.

Grande Discurso, Pequena Ilha: A *Speech Band* de Tobago na Poesia Falada e Tradições Orais

Resumo A *Speech Band*, em Tobago, é uma forma de arte popular, teatral e de oratória apresentada em eventos comunitários, competições culturais, e festivais de tradições de patrimônio cultural. No entanto, essa forma de arte tem sido criticamente omitida dos estudos acadêmicos sobre a genealogia da poesia falada caribenha contemporânea. Apesar de sua importância na produção cultural de identidades em Tobago, a *Speech Band* sofre de negligência epistêmica dentro da área de Estudos Caribenhos, dominada por narrativas de Trinidad e padrões literários centrados na cultura impressa. Nesta discussão, combino pesquisa de arquivos, conduzida em bibliotecas de patrimônio nacional tanto em Trinidad quanto em Tobago, com entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com praticantes e organizadores culturais. Argumento que a invisibilização de *Speech Band* é sintomática de uma dupla marginalidade: as dinâmicas políticas e culturais desiguais entre as ilhas gêmeas e a periferização de tradições orais dentro do cânone literário caribenho.

Palavras-chave: Tobago; Speech Band; poesia falada; tradições orais

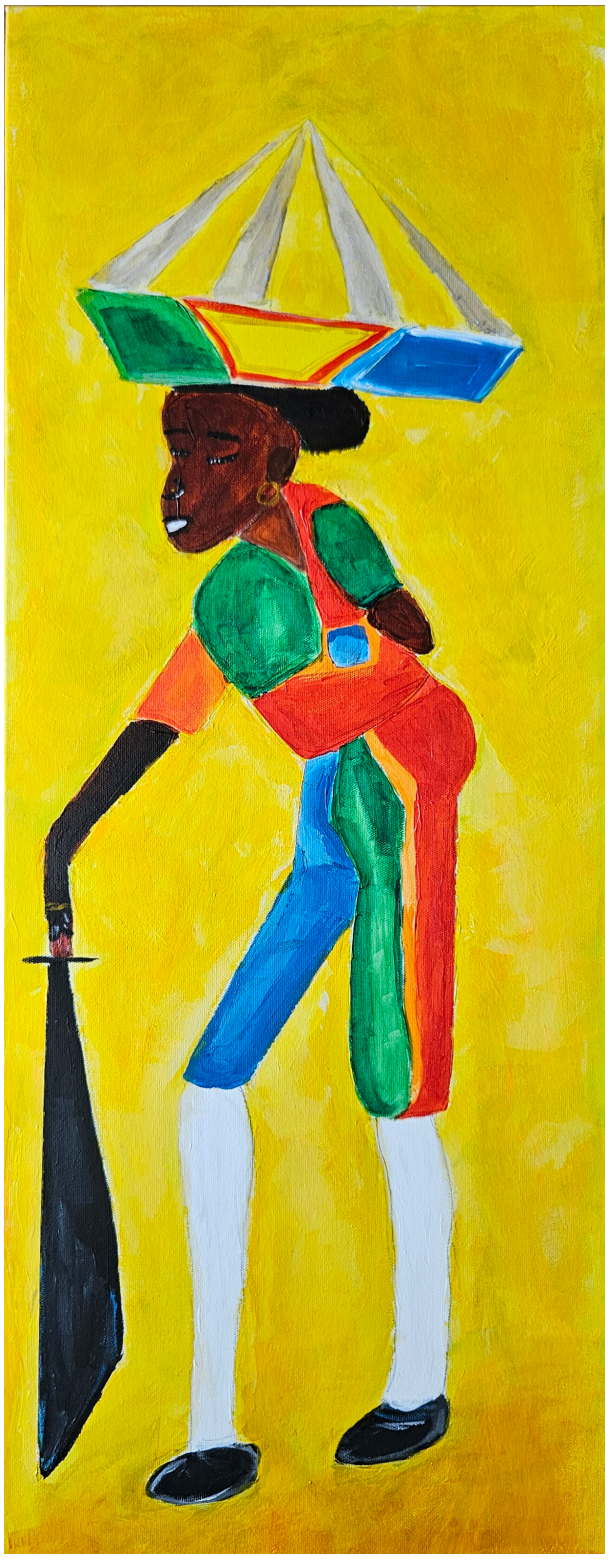
"So, what happened to Tobago and the children who grew up performing 'Drag your bow, Mister Fiddler'?" A few years ago, I was asked this question before a conference presentation on Caribbean spoken word and oral traditions. Until that point, I made no reference to the Speech Band in my writing and public claims on spoken word. The Speech Band is an essential part of Tobago's oral tradition, culture and identity. Tobago is one island of the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago in the southern Caribbean. I am from Trinidad. As a colony, Tobago became linked to Trinidad at the end of the nineteenth century. Brereton (2007, 180) notes that Tobago was a "separate British colony, with two brief periods of French rule, from 1763 to 1889, and this history as an 'independent' colony, along with the geographical separation, lies behind the Tobago narrative." For Brereton, the "Tobago narrative" is an island-based identity constructed in opposition to the "Trinidadian Other," challenging hegemonic (Afro-Creole) narratives of Trinidad and Tobago history by asserting its distinct social development, political cultures, kinship relations and history within the unified state. Trinidad and Tobago became an independent nation from the British in 1962. Tobago has a multi-ethnic and multicultural population, however, the majority of the population on the island is primarily made up of people of African descent. Trinidad is the industrial powerhouse of the pair. Public services and infrastructure are primarily located in Trinidad, though significant investments have been made in Tobago since 1962. Still, there is an uneven political relationship between the two islands. This imbalance has even led to the production of impartial national archives, historiographies, knowledge claims and theoretical frameworks that erase the specific historical context and cultural contributions of Tobago. What responsibilities do writers, performers and scholars from and in Trinidad have to Tobago and Tobagonian cultural identities as we represent national and Caribbean literatures?

The contemporary spoken word movement in Trinidad and Tobago draws from a multifaceted genealogy of literary and performance ancestries. The lineage originates in the place-based traditions of carnival speech characters, such as the Midnight Robber and Pierrot Grenade, alongside lyrical musical genres such as calypso, rapso, ragga soca and more recently, Trinibad. These elements in the national space are further shaped by the influence of Jamaican dub poetry, reggae and dancehall, as well as the impact of North American and British hip-hop, open mics and poetry slam productions. In spite of annual cultural events and festivals that platform Speech Band performers in Tobago, there is a paucity of scholarly literature on the art form. I navigated the national library systems of both islands to access localised texts that were unavailable in the respective sister-island's collections. I complemented this archival work with primary field research, meeting with literary event organizers and cultural performers in Tobago to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of the Speech Band's significance.

In February 2025, I travelled via airplane to Tobago from Trinidad. I arrived in the morning and hired a taxi from the ANR. Robinson International Airport. I listened to local radio announcers discussing the vibrancy of Trinidad's carnival on my way to my first engagement of the day. One announcer said, "you really have to see it for yourself, Tobago. . The Trinidad carnival is truly something." Later in the afternoon, I visited Tobago Library Services in Scarborough. In the Susan Craig James Heritage Library, I was graciously assisted by the senior librarian present. With the exception of a few newspaper commentaries,[1] historical documentation on the Speech Band remains characterized by an archival gap. Documents exist primarily in ephemeral formats such as pamphlets, conference proceedings and reproduced lectures. I scoured the pages of *Drag Yuh Bow Mr. Fiddler* (1987) by Oris Job-Caesar.

[1] See: Rita Pemberton on the history of the Speech Band (2022); Dara E. Healy's reflection on 'speechifying' in storytelling traditions (2022); Healy's short fiction with Speech Band character (2024).

This collection of public lectures and commentary published in the newspaper, frames Speech Band in Tobago as constitutive of a distinct oral tradition and culture in Tobago. Job-Caesar highlights the oral and folk traditions related to socio-linguistics of the Black peasantry, Bongo rituals, Old Time Wedding performances and folk songs.



"de speech band girl from Tobago" by amílcar peter sanatan. Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 36". 2025

The Social Organisation of the Speech Band

The Speech Band is one of the "defining features of the culture of Tobago" (Pemberton 2022). It is a theatrical, musical and oratory art form that synthesises West African storytelling and British folk theatre traditions. Speech Bands are found throughout the island, especially in communities such as Les Coteaux, Mt. Thomas, Parlatuvier and Plymouth. Performers wear costumes, perform musical interludes and recite poetry. Performers repeat the refrain "Drag Your Bow, Mister Fiddler!" during their speeches. Speech Band costumes are self-made or crafted by designers who blend multi-coloured satin or velvet for the suit. Suits are adorned with small mirrors, tassels and bells. Speech Band performers wear tall headpieces, featuring sailing ships or cocked hats. Some performers carry wooden swords.

The organisation of the Speech Band is praised for its collectivist orientation. Pemberton (2022) makes the point that the organisation of the Speech Band "illustrates the contribution that each individual role must make to the operation of the unit within the clear lines of authority . . . it underscored the need for effective leadership for the success of the unit." The Speech Band involves several characters. Spoken in both Tobagonian Creole and an interpretation of "Shakespearean prose" (Hernandez 2004, 3), characters "speechify" social issues, rumours that circulate in villages and individual and communal accomplishments. In many respects, the Speech Band is an appropriation of European theatrical forms. According to Job-Caesar:

> In the 12th century in Europe, masked bands paraded the streets during the winter festivals and entered houses to dance and play in silence. By the 13th century, the disguises became elaborate and in the 16th century the bands were absorbed in the Italian carnival masquerading . . . The main feature of the Tobago play, however, with respect to

> its linkage to the drama of the Old World, is its adaptation from the 16th century Mummers play which was performed mainly in Northern England and which had its narrative framework, the story of St. George and the Seven Champions of Christendom (Job-Caesar 1990, 22).

Charlie Leith, a pioneer of Speech Band in Tobago and performer since 1930, identified fifteen characters in Speech Bands: (i) Show Boy, (ii) Robin, (iii) Lucifer, (iv) Creator, (v) Young Sealey, (vi) Norway, (vii) Wallis, (viii) Hero, (ix) Hero Conqueror, (x) Duke of Wellington, (xi) Valentine, (xii) The King, (xiii) The Doctor, (xiv) My Boy Pompey and (xv) The Commander (Leith 1986, 66). The hat worn by Speech Band performers is a "replica of the sailing cargo ship which transported sugar" during plantation slavery (Hernandez 2004, 3). Traditionally, "all members of the band were male" (Pemberton 2022). This is not surprising given the gender-specific, masculine origins of the characters performed in Speech Band presentations. This pattern reflects the ways in which culture "[naturalises] hierarchies of gender and social class" (Bassi 1997, 318). Performers in the band were once referred to as "Speechmen" (Hernandez 2004, 3). However, Speech Bands today are representative of women and men. Speech Band master trainers such as Deborah Moore-Miggins are widely regarded as custodians of the art form. Across community-based groups, Speech Band performers continually practice, rehearse and perform their craft at different cultural events. The Speech Band features prominently at the Prime Minister's Best Village competition and the Tobago Heritage Festival.

Marginality in the Nation and Literary Studies

As Alison Donnell (2020, 406) observed, there is a "notable unevenness of opportunity" that persists between small and large island societies in the Caribbean. This imbalance is reflected in the marginalisation of the Speech Band in Tobago by a "Trinidad-centric" scholarly focus that prioritises the cultural archives and canonical writers of the larger island at the expense of Tobago's distinct contribution to literary studies and the oral traditions. Print cultures are steeped in power inequalities that often exclude national histories and the contributions of social groups in the margins due to an overreliance on formal publishing as the primary validator of cultural and epistemic value. Oral traditions include art forms of cultural expression that involve speech and some scribal literatures. Oral traditions are primarily created and transmitted through performance modalities. Elements of delivery and embodiment are essential to this standard. For too long, oral traditions, which include folklore were " . . . not considered within the realm of literary archives, because it was not considered a relevant literature or even a literary archive in its own right. More specifically, it was excluded from literary archives due to its form of transmission, social-class origin and racial bias" (Wegner and McIntyre 2021, 12).

Oral traditions have long ignited debates on literary "standards," social class, education and notions of the Caribbean canon. These concerns are not merely theoretical, but they are lived in the regional literary and performance spaces. As a spoken word performer, I have observed and been on the receiving end of dismissiveness and disregard in print-centric literary spaces, though spoken word is widely regarded as one of the most popular literary art forms in Trinidad and Tobago today. Here, Rohlehr incisively calls out the prevailing attitudes that once marginalised oral traditions:

> It is only since the 1970s that the term "oral tradition" began to be consistently used in connection with certain developments in West Indian poetry. Before then the debate concerned the viability of "dialect" as a medium for poetry, and was an extension of the troubled issue of the nexus between education, speech, class, status and power. Creole

> dialects were thought of as belonging to the semi-literate and poor. To argue, as some linguists did and still do, that Creole is simply another language, neither better nor worse than any other, was to ignore the social and political nature of language. To speak about the vitality and expressiveness of Creole was to sentimentalise warm folksiness without wanting to share in the anguish of its decrepitude, and to display the contempt of a complacent intelligentsia, who secretly wanted to reinforce their superior social status by keeping mass of the people uneducated" (Rohlehr 1989, 1).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge efforts to institutionalise the works on orality in Caribbean literary studies. The University College of the West Indies (UCWI) was established in 1948. By 1950, the English Department began teaching canonical literature primarily from the United Kingdom. As social movements transformed Caribbean societies in the post-independence period alongside the expansion of the field of Caribbean writers at "home" and "abroad," "English literature" curricula were disrupted and underwent a series of reforms. New literature courses were developed. "West Indian Literature" was first introduced in 1969 and later courses such as "Oral Tradition and Literature" and "Introduction to Orature" (Morris 2005, 2). These courses, from the UCWI, later reconstituted as The University of the West Indies (UWI), marked early efforts to legitimate oral traditions. Yet, the conceptualisation of orality and orature was restricted to its linguistic dimensions rather than being recognised as a performative modality through which a diverse spectrum of practitioners, including both writers and performers, negotiated their craft. For example, *Voice Print: An Anthology of Oral and Related Poetry from the Caribbean* (1989) edited by Stewart Brown, Mervyn Morris and Gordon Rohlehr played a role in anthologising oral literatures within a print literary framework. However, with the exception of selected writer-performers such as Jean "Binta" Breeze, Mikey Smith, Paul Keens-Douglas and Mutabaruka, and recognition of calypsonians such as the Mighty Sparrow and Leroy "Black Stalin" Calliste, to name a few, this edited collection and other initiatives to identify "orality" in the Caribbean did far less to represent the oeuvres of oral poets, dub poets, spoken word performers and other performers of the oral tradition on their own terms. Rather, the poetry and/or poetics of performers were ascribed with literary merit and included into curated collections and courses that were over-represented with poets who succeeded, and produced almost exclusively, in print literary cultures. The authors inadvertently reproduced the "modern/colonial dichotomy between oral and literary spheres of literary expressions" (Gallien 2020, 49) within a political project to assert a Caribbean literary canon.

Caribbean literary studies are not exempt from other intersecting exclusions, such as geographic exclusions. The underrepresentation of smaller countries and literary cultures outside of the so-called "Big Four" (Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad)[2] are not given equal attention in scholarship. Social tensions between people of the islands of Trinidad and Tobago are steeped in political inequalities and Tobagonian calls for equality, respect and autonomy are meant to redress some of these gaps. There is a prevailing view that several "Trinidadians see Tobagonians (as well as the people from the other smaller Caribbean countries) as small islanders, and thus inferior" (Luke 2001, 44). Notwithstanding the oeuvre of Eric Roach, the national literature of Trinidad and Tobago elevates the literature of one island over the other. Against this background, the Tobago Writers' Guild (TWG) facilitated workshops for writers and reading circles in 2008 to assert a Tobagonian literary tradition. It was formally incorporated in 2010. The TWG was initiated by Tobagonian authors, including award-winning author M. NourbeSe Philip and

[3] Saint Lucia has received significant scholarly and artistic attention as the birthplace of Derek Walcott, the Nobel laureate and accomplished poet, essayist, playwright, and artist. The island's literary tradition remains robust, as evidenced by work of key figures such as Kendel Hippolyte, John Robert Lee, Canisia Lubrin, Vladimir Lucien and Hazel Simmons-McDonald, to name a few.

former politician and acclaimed Speech Band artist Deborah Moore-Miggins. In 2011, TWG hosted the first Tobago Word Festival. Festival director, Moore-Miggins said that the festival is intended "to develop the skill of writing among Tobagonians and to... to develop the skill of writing among Tobagonians and to distinguished writers of Tobago" (Trinidad and Tobago Guardian 2012). Activities in the festival included writing workshops, children's storytelling, a spoken word competition and an open mic. The festival has been hosted in partnership with other Tobago-based non-governmental organisations with support from the Tobago House of Assembly.

Building the Stage for Tobago's Speech Band and Heritage

I returned to Trinidad to further my exploration of archives related to the Speech Band. At the public library in Port-of-Spain, a young librarian expressed that young librarian explained that he never heard of... never heard of the Speech Band. Another librarian said, "we will try our best to help and copy anything we can find because this is a niche study." Quickly, a team of three librarians assisted me in my efforts and guided me to the newspaper archive of the Tobago Heritage Festival. We discussed our shared lack of knowledge about Speech Bands, new insights I gained during my research in Tobago, and the need for students and writers in the national community to return to archives in the heritage library for an enriched understanding of the cultures of both islands. The recommended readings of the librarians brought into focus the way cultural forms are staged in our society.

In 1984, J. D. Elder, cultural anthropologist who held the position of Secretary for Culture in the Tobago House of Assembly, convened the 1984 Conference on Culture and the Cultural Heritage of Tobago at the Blue Haven Hotel and the Mt. Irvine Bay Hotel. A. N. R. Robinson, then Chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, at its launch, remarked that the conference, alongside other conferences on tourism, the environment and agriculture, was critical because it increased public participation in Tobago's cultural affairs and contributed to the formation of the Tobago Development Plan (Robinson 1986, 6). J. D. Elder noted that the conference was critical because it emphasized Tobago's cultural heritage and cultural identities in national development at the time when Trinidad and Tobago celebrated its 150th anniversary of emancipation from plantation slavery (Elder 1986, 7). One of the recommendations that followed the conference was to action the "urgent need to preserve Tobago's cultural heritage independently and apart from the Prime Minister's Best Village competition" (Hernandez 2004, 1). As a result, the Tobago Heritage Festival was inaugurated in 1986.

As early as 1988, commentary in the newspaper raised the issue about the presence of the Speech Band in their review of the Tobago Heritage Festival. Rhoma Spencer (1988, 9) shared a frustration: "It is amazing one of the most powerful literary dramatic art forms—the Speech Band—was not present in this camp or at all in the festival." What followed after this year were records of the Speech Band as an integral part of activities alongside others such as Courtship Codes, Tobago Ole Time Wedding, and calypso competitions. The Tobago Heritage Festival provided an opportunity for Tobagonians to create and exchange culture through the arts in their "natural environment" (Trinidad Guardian 1989, 13). Since the 1990s, the Speech Band has been consistently featured in the Tobago Heritage Festival; groups competed for prizes and showcased their performances to national and international audiences.

Janae Campbell, a twenty-three-year-old youth activist and cultural performer from Tobago began her engagement with the Speech Band as a student at Belle Garden Anglican Primary School. She remembers the art form as a staple of school competitions and the Tobago Heritage Festival. As a secondary school student, she began performing with the Roxborough Police Youth Club. She participated in Speech Band rehearsals, eventually "writing speeches"

for various cultural events. Campbell recalls that her youth club troupe featured only one male performer. The majority of the performers were young women. At the same time, Campbell is conscious of the subaltern status of the Speech Band within the national imaginary. She said:

> We live in this national scope. But, Tobago is the smaller island. You study Caribbean History and Advanced History. In those subjects, the contributions of Tobagonians are dimmed and barely mentioned. It is my wish to introduce this culture more to Trinidad. This art form is indigenous to Tobago.

In a more explicit form of advocacy, Campbell actively promotes the Speech Band through the Tobago Students' Association at the UWI, leveraging the performance to assert her Tobagonian identity and celebrate the island's unique oral traditions.

Conclusion: Recovering the Poetics of the Speech Band

In my experience as a cultural practitioner and researcher in spoken word for almost two decades I do not recollect cultural events where the Speech Band was on stage in Trinidadian events. To The error of omission in scholarship was a knowledge gap that I once held in my understanding of the performance and cultural landscapes of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.. Through travelling, engaging performers and being present in the heritage archives, I better understand the Tobagonians' feelings of exclusion when national stages and discourses take for granted their history, identities and cultures. And, I feel a greater sense of responsibility to enhance and expand our sense of place and political imagination to recognise and respect the oral traditions of my society and space in its totality. Jewel Greene-George, current President of the Tobago Writers' Guild, said, "You hear 'Drag your bow, Mister Fiddler!' You see them in the hat, some have a boat on their heads, some carry swords, some hold a bow in their hands. They wear fluffy pants with different colours. Speech Band is right up there with the oral traditions. There is bravado, communication about social issues, dealing with issues of incest and rape, and talking about mischief in the community." The Speech Band is one of the most vibrant cultural art forms of our national culture. *You really have to see it for yourself* . . .

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REVEL

Sashoya Simpson

A young child stands barefoot beneath the branches of an almond tree
They look on as colorful skirts twirl in the hands of swaying hips
Palms of musicians echo the song of drums
Of marimbulas
Of shak-shaks
Calling ancestors forward
Singing ancient tongues
Evoking battle ritual
Swaying firm
With grace bestowed
In hand
In foot
In waist
In throat
As every body part wake up and join the party
Drowning out ningy-ningy bias from ministers, naysayers, sideliners
The child steps from the shadows
Dirt under footbottom
Holding weight of the charge
Walking stilts tower high above
A grand expanse of might
Of story
Of stance
Of unbridled resistance
Of joy
The child take center stage
Theatre stage
Concert stage
Bar stage
Marketplace
Grandma living room
Town square
Banana walk
And shout in the voice of the people

Dance in island colours
Dub in rhyme and rhythms
Chant in proverbs and nation tongue
Dismantle the oppressive
Let them know
Be seen
Be heard
Be change

We change
As we behold
Footprinted path carving legacies
Revolutions
Rebellions
Decolonial tapestries
We erect structures
Movements
Pathways
For survival of voice
For preservation
For freedom of creation
Of expression
Of identities
We revel in virtuosity
We revel in prowess
And it's loud
It's loud so our children can inherit
It's loud for our people to bask in pride
It's loud for the world to know
We carry lifetimes in our words
In our actions
In our presence
On the stage.

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Why Latin American Theatre Struggles to Reach Beyond Its Borders: How the Postdramatic Theatre Movement Happened in Latin America in the 1970s But No One Noticed

Marilo Nuñez

Abstract This essay argues that the experimental theatrical innovations that emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s paralleled, and in some cases anticipated, what Hans-Thies Lehmann later termed postdramatic theatre. While both movements sought to dismantle traditional dramatic structures and reimagine theatre's relationship to politics and performance, only the European postdramatic movement has been canonized within global theatre discourse. By contrast, Latin America's "theatre of crisis"—born out of dictatorship, repression, and anti-colonial resistance—has been marginalized, its contributions obscured by Eurocentric hierarchies that continue to define what is considered legitimate theatrical innovation. Through a comparative analysis of these two movements, this essay exposes the colonial biases embedded in global theatre history and theory. It argues that while postdramatic theatre represented an aesthetic rebellion from within the cultural center, Latin American theatre embodied a decolonial insurgency from the margins—one that fused politics, ritual, and community-based creation as a means of survival and transformation. Recognizing this lineage demands a re-evaluation of the global theatrical canon and an acknowledgment of Latin American theatre's central role in shaping modern performance practice.

Keywords: postdramatic theatre, latin american theatre, political theatre

Por qué el Teatro Latinoamericano Lucha por Trascender sus Fronteras: Cómo surgió el Movimiento del Teatro Posdramático en América Latina en la Década de 1970 pero Nadie se dio cuenta

Resumen Este ensayo sostiene que las innovaciones teatrales experimentales que surgieron en América Latina durante las décadas de 1960 y 1970 fueron paralelas, y en algunos casos anticiparon, lo que Hans-Thies Lehmann denominaría más tarde teatro posdramático. Si bien ambos movimientos buscaban desmantelar las estructuras dramáticas tradicionales y replantear la relación del teatro con la política y la actuacion, solo el movimiento posdramático europeo ha sido canonizado dentro del discurso teatral global. . En contraste, el "teatro de la crisis" de América Latina —nacido de la dictadura, la represión y la resistencia anticolonial— ha sido marginado, y sus aportes han quedado oscurecidos por jerarquías eurocéntricas que continúan definiendo qué se considera una innovación teatral legítima. . A través de un análisis comparativo de estos dos movimientos, este ensayo revela los sesgos coloniales incrustados en la historia y la teoría teatral global. Sostiene que mientras el teatro posdramático representó una rebelión estética desde el centro cultural, el teatro latinoamericano encarnó una insurgencia decolonial desde los

márgenes, — una que fusionó política, ritual y creación comunitaria como medios de supervivencia y transformación. Reconocer esta genealogía exige una reevaluación del canon teatral global y un reconocimiento del papel central del teatro latinoamericano en la configuración de las prácticas modernas de actuacion.

Palabras Clave: teatro posdramático; teatro latinoamericano; teatro político

Por que o Teatro Latino-americano Luta para Ir Além de suas Fronteiras: Como o Movimento do Teatro Pós-Dramático Ocorreu na América Latina na Década de 1970, mas Ninguém Notou

Resumo Este artigo argumenta que as inovações experimentais que surgiram na América Latina durante as décadas de 1960 e 1970 ocorreram em paralelo e, em alguns casos, anteciparam o que Hans-Thies Lehmann mais tarde denominou de teatro pós-dramático. Embora ambos os movimentos buscassem desmantelar as estruturas dramáticas tradicionais e reimaginar a relação do teatro com a política e a performance, apenas o movimento pós-dramático europeu foi canonizado no discurso teatral global. Em contrapartida, o "teatro de crise" latino-americano—nascido de ditaduras, repressão e resistência anticolonial—foi marginalizado, tendo suas contribuições obscurecidas por hierarquias eurocêntricas que continuam a definir o que é considerado uma inovação teatral legítima. Por meio de uma análise comparativa desses dois movimentos, este artigo expõe os vieses coloniais enraizados na história e na teoria do teatro global. O texto sustenta que, enquanto o teatro pós-dramático representou uma rebelião estética a partir do centro cultural, o teatro latino-americano personificou uma insurgência decolonial a partir das margens—uma insurgência que fundiu política, ritual e criação comunitária como um meio de sobrevivência e transformação. Reconhecer essa linhagem exige uma reavaliação do cânone teatral global e um reconhecimento do papel central do teatro latino-americano na formação das práticas modernas de performance.

Palavras-chave: teatro pós-dramático, teatro latino-americano, teatro político

During the mid-twentieth century (mid-1940s to late 1960s), a transformational movement emerged within theatre and performance in Europe and the Western world. This movement challenged traditional theatre aesthetics and language by shifting focus away from the text, breaking with conventional storytelling, and rethinking theatre's role in society and politics. This shift known as "postdramatic theatre,"' a term formalized by Hans-Thies Lehmann, German scholar and theatre analyst, was "a dissolution and distancing between drama and theatre that creates a new theatre no longer based on drama" (Lehmann 2006, 30). This new movement focused on a narrative structure that placed performance at the centre by breaking traditional theatrical conventions which incorporate experimental and non-linear narratives and challenging the conventional separation between performer and spectator (Sharma 2024). It embraced a deliberate move away from the Aristotelian model and created a "rupture of the dramatic structure of classical texts" (Lehmann 2006, 2). Postdramatic theatre did not simply imply "after drama" but deconstructed what was there while maintaining its relationship to what came before (Lehmann 2006, 2). Simultaneously, a similar movement of experimental avant-garde theatre emerged in Latin America at around the same time (between 1969 and the 1980s), one defined by political aesthetics, revolutionary ideologies, and a response to repression and the trauma of dictatorships. In the same vein as the postdramatic movement, the Latin American movement repositioned the text and the context of creation and moved away from traditional structures. Although these movements coincided with similar aesthetics and theatrical innovations and emerged around similar time frames, it is the Latin American avant-garde theatre movement which remains excluded from international recognition and critical discourse in the way that Lehmann's postdramatic theatre movement does not. While both challenged conventional theatrical forms through experimentation and socio-political critique, it was Latin America's theatrical innovations—rooted in regional struggles, Indigenous aesthetics and collective activism—that have been historically under-recognized in the global context, revealing a critical gap in the historical body of modern theatre that demands re-evaluation.

Interestingly, this new postdramatic theatre appeared precisely when socio-political events were exploding worldwide. The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, were moments of rupture, violence, and growing socio-political upheaval which influenced the artistic milieu of the 20th century but were not necessarily the cause of what Lehmann came to describe as the "crisis of theatre." This crisis was a more personal one, as it came from within. Theatre practitioners were evaluating form and structure on an intellectual, personal, and emotional level; there was no *actual* threat of political violence, persecution or exclusion by an oppressive dominant culture. Instead, there was a contemplative reassessment of what theatre could do and the forms it could take. As such, as current scholar on post dramatic theory, Michale Boyle states, the postdramatic theory did not open its gaze out to the rest of the world but rather would "risk[s] privileging certain issues, experiences, and perspectives, in ways that can be specially charged racially" (Boyle et al. 2019, 21).

Diana Taylor called what was happening at this pivotal time in Latin America's theatre ecology a "theatre of crisis" because it existed to process and re-emerge from the ashes of

violence, dictatorships, and political upheaval. It was a deliberate reaction to the impacts of colonialism, imperialism, Neo-liberalism and capitalism. The "theatre of crisis" carried a political impetus because of its connection to mestizaje (the blending of Indigenous and European within the same body). In Latin America, when "the first incursions of neoliberal capital in the Americas," (Ybarra 2017, 3) started occurring and the Cuban revolution posed a threat to the United States counterinsurgency, a pivotal turning point was happening for the people and the politics of the region. And it was through theatre, where one could witness most prominently, the reflections of this tumultuous period exposed. This new theatre exploded in Latin America, especially amongst universities and student groups, with a palpable excitement and energy for this new work. It was politically motivated theatre-making which came with a new theatrical vision, a new audience, and a new artist that had not yet existed. This crisis served as more than an aesthetic change with a move towards societal and political awareness and change.

The comparison between Latin America's "theatre of crisis" and the postdramatic "crisis of theatre" is demonstrated best by examining the fundamental elements within each movement, by narrowing in on what lies at the centre of the change. There are five core principles which bring the two movements into a parallel juxtaposition. The first is the political context, as stated earlier in this piece, where Latin American theatre was created against the backdrop of dictatorships and revolutionary movements as a way to explore a new world order, while the postdramatic theatre, even though there were political events occurring during this time period globally, this practitioner was dealing more with post-1968 disillusionment and late stage capitalism; Lehmann extrapolates on his beliefs around political discourse within theatre by saying, "That politically oppressed people are shown on stage does not make theatre political. And if the political in its sensational aspects merely procures entertainment value, then theatre may well be political—but only in the bad sense of an (at least unconscious) affirmation of existing political conditions. It is not through the direct thematization of the political that theatre becomes political but through the implicit substance and critical value of its *mode of representation*" (Lehmann 2006, 243). In both movements, theatre was a way to create new realities and new theories of practice while positioning the self against the backdrop of socio-political realities; but one obviously had more at stake than the other. In the second element, aesthetic influence, Latin American theatre was infused with Indigenous/folk representation, agitprop, and realism, while in the postdramatic, its influences were deconstruction, philosophy, and Eurocentric visual arts. In describing the audience for these movements, this third element, audience, shows how in Latin America the audience is active and participatory, while in the postdramatic space, the audience is often more reflective and observational. What can this difference be attributed to? Taylor describes how in "theatre of crisis" there is inclusion of the voices systematically left out of the cultural history of the continent; therefore, the audience participates because it sees itself represented (Taylor 1991, 7). Whereas with the postdramatic audience member, there seems to be more distance. Finally, in terms of recognition and influence, Latin American theatre is limited by geopolitical and language barriers, while the postdramatic theatre tends to have strong academic and critical engagement. These comparisons highlight a fundamental difference in approach and style, and one cannot ignore the "first world" versus the "third world" reality of these two movements coming from two

distinct areas of the globe at that time. These terms are no longer in use, for obvious reasons, but they do determine an invisible ideology about privilege and status within the global order. In other words, Latin America "exists" because Europe made it so. Latin American theatre comes from what has been known for many years as the "third world," (now called the global south). It is a term coined during the Cold War to differentiate between countries that were neither part of the West (NATO) nor the East (Communist bloc). Because of this distinction, the "third world" has always been seen as inferior. And even though postdramatic theatre and Latin American theatre question traditional forms and aesthetics equally, Western practitioners from Europe and the United States are not fighting colonization and imperial domination in the way that the "third world" is. There is a fundamental power imbalance within the structures of societal and political realities.

The decolonial process in Latin American theatre, especially as seen within anti-colonial and anti-Western alternatives of creation (such as through collective creation, orality and embodied storytelling), performed as a veritable protest to power and became a theatrical platform for socio-political awareness which incorporated community renewal and change. It was this distinction where on the one hand, postdramatic theatre highlighted an innate privilege of elitism and historical theatrical relevance over the rest of the world; while on the other hand in Latin American theatre, it was a survival tool in response to a political reality steeped in coloniality and subjugation. The postdramatic was seen as avant-garde, innovative and a valuable expression of experimentation and evolution because of where it originated. The Latin American theatre neither received the accolades nor the same recognition, also because of where it originated. Mignolo, in his examination of Latin America's origins, describes how, "the Americas exist today only as a consequence of European colonial expansion and the narrative of that expansion from the European perspective of modernity" (Mignolo 2005).

Kirsten Nigro, a United States scholar, writes in her paper *On the Visibility of Latin American Theatre*, "The dominance of Eurocentric theories often muffles or completely silences the theoretical discourses that come from Latin America itself . . . [and] Latin American playwrights and theatre artists remain relatively unknown in the larger academic and theatre world . . . the truth is that, in the English-speaking world, Latin American theatre is located at the outer boundaries of consciousness; or, even worse, it is invisible" (Nigro 2004, 447). This invisibility is the result of historical domination and oppression, which creates a continent so marked by colonial rule that what emerges, culturally, is not seen as equal to its Western counterpart because of the creation of an "other" (Taylor 2003, 13–14). Imperialism and colonialism expose the foundation of Latin America's relationship to "otherness," a condition which begins to take form during the early years of colonization. Latin American playwrights pose questions of positionality, definition, and identity (political and cultural), not simply to experiment with form, but to examine the oppression and colonization. These questions come out of a need to question the history of domination which Latin America has been subjected to since the first colonizers stepped on its soil (Taylor 1998, 22). Western theatre has seen itself (and perhaps continues to think of itself) as the centre of the universe for centuries, especially when it comes to art and culture. The dominant countries within the Western world, Great Britain, France, and Spain, have enacted historical acts of domination, colonization, and imperial rule. These countries are the ones with the power to control the narrative

(literally and figuratively) since the colonization of the New World began in the 15th century (Said 2014, 14). Postdramatic theory and practice comes from this epicentre, a cultural dominator, therefore it embodies this superiority complex.

Many scholars who examine the effects of the conquest on Latin America highlight how a perpetual sense of "other" has been created through a consistent and integrative approach of systemic violence and devaluing of the core belief systems of the indigenous cultures they conquered. The Conquistadores created the narrative that the civilized human, the European, was superior to the primitive indigenous or "native" in every way, alluding to "them" (the "other") as "barbarian" and thus a less superior specimen. In *The Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, Matthew Restall describes how the Spaniards gave the "natives" their humanity (Restall 2004, 165) through violence and subjugation. "The Spanish jurist and philosopher openly stated that 'natives' hardly deserve the name of human beings." Even complete conversion and subjection to the Spanish empire could only partially turn these 'barbarians' into 'civilized' men."[1] Even today, Latin America in the 21st century lives with the continual psychological, ecological, and political effects(s) of colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Taylor outlines in *Theatre of Crisis*, colonial oppression creates and defines a perpetual "other" because of its economic, cultural, and emotional ties to the empire. Displacement, fragmentation, and a twisted sense of self are all themes/realities across Latin America. The use of theatre and spectacle, a tool used by the conquistadores to subjugate the indigenous populations, was instrumental in creating this ingrained belief system (Taylor 1998, 2). Theatricality and religious ceremonies were tools to Christianize and colonize the Americas by utilizing the same native rituals these civilizations used to empower and survive—the conquistadores used to reverse (or invert) pre-Colombian patterns to dominate. Where once the religious ceremony was a vital link between social and cosmic orders, it was now a tool for political power and hierarchies for the conquistadores. Theatre was a tool to inspire terror (Ibid, 2). Conquest was a process of breaking down the spirit of the indigenous population, thus creating an internalization of colonialism. This "othering" creates self-hatred and an acceptance of the self as "other." The sense of inferiority prevails and infuses every aspect of society. This self-hatred is then further reflected in work (Ibid, 2). It is Latin American theatre's foundation of internalized colonialism and "otherness" that pervades this exclusion from academic and Western dialogue in theatre and performance. Latin American theatre is not taken seriously because of this preconceived bias based on far-reaching colonial impacts and the creation of a mestizo nation (a hybrid) that continues to be an "other."

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, the documentation of knowledge in written form and the archiving of Western knowledge allows the dominant culture to survive and subjugate while the more embodied, ephemeral knowing, at the core of Indigenous cosmology, disappears. "What changed with the conquest was not that writing displaced embodied practice . . . but the degree of legitimization of writing over other epistemic and mnemonic systems. Writing now ensured that power could be developed and enforced without the input of the great majority of the population, the Indigenous and marginal populations of the colonial period without access to

[1] Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford University Press, 2004

systemic writing" (Taylor 2003, 18). A key difference between Latin American theatre and postdramatic theatre is between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, best looked at through the examination of two writers, one from the West, the other from Latin America, as they navigate the creation of text and character within their works. For example, the German playwright Heiner Goebell, when writing his text for *Roman Dogs*, "[he creates] a collage made up of spiritual texts by Heiner Müller in German and by William Faulkner in English (The Sanctuary), and French Alexandrine verses from Corneille's Horace (performed by the actress Catherine Jaumiaux)" (Lehmann 2006, 187). Alternately in *La Profesora* (The Teacher) by Latin American playwright Enrique Buenaventura, "he situates us in the lacuna, the dead space created by the violent . . . confrontation *between*, rather than *within*, changing sociopolitical orders . . . the teacher, let herself die by refusing to eat and drink after her father . . . was shot by incoming military soldiers, who later raped her" (Taylor 1998, 193). While one playwright mashes and creates a collage of other texts to highlight a new form of text, the other uses political metaphor within the work to demonstrate the reality of what violence and life under the military mean to the characters and, thus, the audience. In Buenaventura's work, the protagonist is always the marginal and the oppressed, and it is a place where the subjugated finally take centre stage. His play focuses on the self-struggling to free itself from the grotesque "other" (Taylor 2003, 51). Latin American theatre signals a commitment to social inquiry and change on the part of the playwrights (Ibid, 40), while Western playwrights do not focus on this exploration as much. The postdramatic theatre writer questions the dominant cultural aesthetics (such as the Aristotelian three-act structure) and deconstructs drama and performance. While this is also important for the Latin American theatre practitioner, the importance of politics and colonial history are instrumental in developing the Latin American "theatre of crisis," which breaks with bourgeois models and commits itself to social inquiry and change (Taylor 1991, 40). It has a clearly defined ideological position and a specific proletariat audience (Ibid, 40). Both *Roman Dogs* and *La Profesora* fall directly in line with the tenets of postdramatic theatre because they break the conventions of the well-made play; they deconstruct narrative structure, break the fourth wall through moments of direct address, and they make the audience complicit in the storytelling.

While both postdramatic and Latin American theatre emerged and developed significantly during the 20th century, Latin American work did not and does not receive equal recognition within the global discourse on theatrical innovation because of its coloniality and political positioning within global aesthetics. In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis argues that Eurocentrism in theatre is not necessarily a rejection of non-Western forms but rather a narrow, limited view that fails to understand or value conceptual tools outside European frameworks. He writes, "Eurocentrism is not so much a rejection of eastern forms as a myopic view of other forms and especially conceptual tools different from those in Europe, an inability to conceptualize cultural modelling, western and eastern, theoretically and globally" (Pavis 2003, 16). This critical lens is seen in recent discourse, which challenges how European and Western theatre often position themselves as the sole bearers of knowledge and authority in theatrical practice and theory (Davis et al. 2003, 16). This superiority complex contributes to the marginalization of Latin American theatre, despite its simultaneous and equally radical development alongside movements such as

postdramatic theatre. The issue lies not in a lack of innovation within Latin American theatre, but in the colonial legacy that continues to shape it and asks which forms of theatre have legitimacy and value. Taylor writes, "The questions of position (political and cultural centrality versus marginality), definition, and identity, and the concerns with oppression, colonization, self-hatred . . . arise as a consequence of the cultural, economic, and political history of domination" (Taylor 1991, 22). As current global theatre conversations begin to reckon with the field's colonial, patriarchal, and white supremacist roots—especially in the wake of movements like Black Lives Matter—there is growing recognition of the need to decolonize theatrical discourse and practice. However, the exclusion of Latin American theatre from academic canons and theoretical discussions remains a symptom of deep-seated Eurocentric hierarchies and a white supremacist worldview. The West's claim to theatre as originating solely from Ancient Greece—and its positioning of Eurocentric texts and theories as the standard of excellence—reinforces this imbalance. When Hans-Thies Lehmann describes the postdramatic as "drama after drama," he fails to consider that Western artists engage in these aesthetic shifts within their lineage. In contrast, Latin American practitioners who challenge form simultaneously challenge colonial authority and cultural domination. This fundamental difference reveals a profound asymmetry: one questions tradition, the other confronts imposed systems of oppression.

If theatre is, at its core, a space for mimesis and interrogation, then we must collectively deconstruct these colonial foundations and reconstruct a theatre in dialogue with those historically excluded. Forging in struggle and resistance, Latin American theatre stands as a beacon of integrity and innovation. Despite a legacy of violence and upheaval, it has always been decolonial at its core—its commitment to questioning authority and redefining form should serve as a model for theatre's future. As Taylor (1991) notes, even during the colonial destruction of Indigenous cultures, theatrical traditions like *Rabinal Achi* and *El Güegüense* embodied subtle but powerful resistance. Though not strictly Indigenous, these performances used oral traditions, narrative, song, and mimesis to sustain cultural memory and subvert colonial authority over time. Latin American theatre continues this legacy of resistance, and its contributions deserve recognition and centrality in conversations around global theatrical practice.

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Bottle Gourd Sprout, Calabash Open Mic

Rhea Manley

for Della Manley

2012:

I was shaking. My mother and her friend, Esther, nudged me onto the Calabash stage. I gripped the podium, pinning my poem down to stop the sea breeze from discarding my metaphors. I had a curious near-confidence, a bit of a disconnect from reality. It was the first time I realized that the Prednisone I was on for my skin crisis could make me high; high enough to get through two poems I wrote in Poetry 301 as an undergraduate English Literature student in Portland, Oregon, after I decided to let go seven years of girls' school and Jamaica, at least for a while. It might seem that I left chasing a dream to write, but it was more of a nascent inclination. It's just been there even when I get lost in the business of other things. My aunt Rachel declared my future when she came over to dinner one night when I was a girl. She was making up stories about the cows printed on our plastic children's placemats and named my fate. "You are the writer," she said. Since then, I have not been able to leave literature alone.

Open mics can feel like transition events between big sets and big-named featured authors. Some of the audience will go home to refresh themselves—Treasure Beach is hot. Others remain to enjoy the festival in its fullness—always open to a "good" or "bad" performance of new voices, unpublished writers and people who want to be brave and share their poems.

The audience for the segment I read in was over a hundred strong, decked out in linen or cotton, some in something special and fresh from a local designer. Like them, I was dressed for the weather. But looking back at the photos from the day, I wonder if I chose my clothes in the dark; nothing matched.

I think I read a poem I'd written about the flag I'd hung up in my white-walled room to assert my homesickness-induced patriotism in the substance-free hall I was living in. The poem has had several names, starting life as "Emblem," becoming "Explication of a Flag"; but when it was going to emerge into a publication and I was tasked with finding a better title, I drew for support from my Aunt Sarah, who said with no fuss, "What about 'Gold for the Chains?'" Honestly, though, I don't know if that was the poem I read *that* day, but I know it was my mother and Esther who endeavoured to push me on stage; my aunt who helped me to make a quick and bold decision when I was waffling, and I know that the selection of poems I read at the open mic in the slot of Carolyn Cooper's strict three minutes was met with loud applause from the crowd.

When I came off the stage, adrenaline waning, Mommy smiled; hugged me. I exhaled. A world was opening. Something big had happened. No different from a first publication, it was an

affirmation. Not yet thinking too much about what it might all mean, I was getting to a place where I could rest in the knowledge that home *could* appreciate my work read aloud.

2014:

That year, it wasn't my mother who took me there. I didn't know yet about the haste required to book a room for the weekend, or how tenuous a booking you thought you'd secured might be if your host hadn't yet realized the dates you'd made a query about were for Calabash weekend. The first impediment: my sister and I would be staying forty minutes away from the festival. The second: I had to work, so we'd be leaving in the evening. The third: we used Google Maps to find our way, a choice that my mother had significant reservations about. She'd laid a map on the table showing us the route from Montego Bay, filled her radiator up and reminded us to get gas. Seven hours later, the gas light was flashing and the car overheating (she hadn't tightened the cap completely). We had no idea where we were and were fairly certain that on one of the many wrong turns, we had met a three-piece-suited ghost. We made it in spite of overconfident tech but missed the Friday night readings.

In any case, seasoned Calabash goers know how to choose a seat where breeze blows, or one from which you can easily slip out when it might be the right time (for you) to get a bite from Jack Sprat or to dip out to the beach for a few. But significantly, if they want to read on the open mic, performance hopefuls should know that they should fly, not run, to the front of the tent as soon as the sign-up for the session is announced.

I was just in time for both, and looking forward to reading my palindrome; a poem born from a class assignment where I recounted a night of pain when I'd burnt my hands on scotch bonnet pepper and failed to scrub them of the oils well enough before I bathed. My poetry teacher was intrigued by the imagery and impressed that I had managed to mirror the first half of the poem and the experience so well but felt the poem could do more. She challenged me to make the setting more vivid. I started to think about home; remembered the particular unrest of the summer before. After seven edits, the poem became a less perfect palindrome, a worker cooking soup overhearing blithely indifferent privileged yacht club patrons while in the East, Kingston heard the reverberation of shelling through Tivoli at varying decibel levels depending on their distance from the clock. My reading went well: crowd clapped, kudos dropped. Neat, tidy, sub-three minutes.

2016:

I bombed. My poem fell splat on the Calabash open mic stage. By then, I thought I'd grown comfortable with Carolyn Cooper's sequencing system. I would also try to get out of my head enough to appreciate the readers slated ahead of me. Until this point, I had felt enough angst melt as I crossed the stage to deliver, feeling the momentum of the energy of whichever reader had come on before and the crowd's reception pull me out and drive me to get settled and get on with my own.

Energies remain on stage. This time, a set of high school students heralded to the front of the tent as I was signing up, somehow ended up with a bloc of spots. It didn't help that they were chaperoned by an ex of mine whom I had met under similar conditions.

What followed was a forty-five-minute set made up of their dramatic monologues about teenage angst and feelings. No showing, just telling us all about how very difficult life as a fifteen-year-old was with no acknowledgement that a microphone might amplify the decibels of their communiques. As they read, the crowd filed out. I was thrown by the time I reached the podium. I faced a near-empty tent. I read my poem and the few still there did not seem to realize I was done at the end. Sparse clapping closed my reading.

I returned to the tent, fighting tears through the session that followed. Back in the room I had rented for the weekend, I cried. At the time, I felt the high school students had sucked the energy out of the stage. They hadn't, though. An open mic is a gamble. On any given day, a stage could field craft-conscious emerging hopefuls, an inspired reader sharing an excerpt from a medical text, the self-published author promoting their work without marketing budget and billboard for their book, and new poets (even high school students) making their debut on a world-acclaimed stage in their country, in their backyard, available to us.

With even more time to consider what could have gone wrong, the poem I read didn't lend naturally to a strong stage performance and I hadn't prepared enough. You can never predict your audience and trying to anticipate what company you might find yourself in on a stage is a fool's errand. A stage and the audience in that exact moment are something to meet. It was also my first experience with teenagers and poetry. My better angels have won out in how I think about their work and how brave they were to share it in that medium when my own version of such poems ended life on DeviantArt.

My own shortcomings at the front of a classroom, a truly terrifying stage, have shown me enough times that I need to wheel and come again when I misjudge what cultural reference or song might intrigue my students in a PowerPoint. Drawing for Sting when discussing the Russian revolution with sixteen-year-olds will humble you quickly. It is always key to respect the stage, which remains at the border of the lawn at Jake's in and out of Calabash season, which, without the tent, the bookshop, and rows of expectant chairs, shrinks.

Rhea Manley is pursuing an MA in Literatures in English at UWI Mona. Her chapbook, *Girl School*, was published in 2025 by Peekash Press as part of the Bocas Breakthrough Fellowship for emerging writers, which Manley was awarded in 2024. Her poetry was shortlisted for the Edward Baugh Prize for Poetry in 2019 and 2022, and has been published in *PREE Magazine*, *New Voices: Selected by Lorna Goodison* (UWI Press, 2019), *Caribbean Quarterly*, and other literary outlets.

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