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“In Plenty and In Time of Need”: Popular Culture and the Remapping of Barbadian Identity

by

Lia Tamar Bascomb

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

in the Graduate Division

of

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Leigh Raiford, Chair

Professor Brandi Catanese

Professor Nadia Ellis

Professor Laura Pérez

Spring 2013

“In Plenty and In Time of Need”: Popular Culture and the Remapping of Barbadian Identity

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Lia Tamar Bascomb

Abstract

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University of California at Berkeley

Professor Leigh Raiford, Chair

This dissertation is a cultural history of Barbados since its 1966 independence. As a pivotal point in the Transatlantic Slave Trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one of Britain’s most prized colonies well into the mid twentieth century, and, since 1966, one of the most stable postcolonial nation-states in the Western hemisphere, Barbados offers an extremely important and, yet, understudied site of world history. Barbadian identity stands at a crossroads where ideals of British respectability, African cultural retentions, U.S. commodity markets, and global economic flows meet. Focusing on the rise of Barbadian popular music, performance, and visual culture this dissertation demonstrates how the unique history of Barbados has contributed to complex relations of national, gendered, and sexual identities, and how these identities are represented and interpreted on a global stage. This project examines the relation between the global pop culture market, the Barbadian artists within it, and the goals and desires of Barbadian people over the past fifty years, ultimately positing that the popular culture market is a site for postcolonial identity formation.

With this project I put Barbadian history, visual analysis, performance theory, cultural theory, diaspora theory, and gender theory in conversation. The first two chapters offer a cultural history of Barbadian identity focusing on independence in 1966. Using the theoretical framework of national sincerity, I argue that the nation’s history of performance and migration has made national representation a constitutive part of national identity formation. The next three chapters focus on the images of three of the nation’s most popular performers who have strong audiences outside of the region as well: Alison Hinds, Rupert “Rupe” Clarke, and Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty. Using these three artists, the project analyzes how femininity, masculinity, and sexuality are put in service of Barbadian nationalism. The final chapter explores the ways in which pop culture images circulate through new technologies that redefine the boundaries of nation and identity. Using Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the hyperreal, I argue that the definition of national identity Barbados has struggled with occurs most poignantly in the realm of representation. By

examining websites, blogs, and digital products of these artists I conclude the project with a re-examination of the ways in which commodity, sexuality, gender performance, and diasporic consciousness undergird individual careers and national representations.

“In Plenty and In Time of Need” shows that the post-independence Barbadian nation-state relies upon regionalism and transnationalism, and that its popular culture artists use diasporic resources to both promote and define a national identity. Using personal interviews, newspapers, internet blogs, and various archival sources, my work reveals how an analysis of Barbadian identity constructions can demonstrate the ways in which transnationalism, popular culture, and diasporic consciousness interact in the postcolonial world.

This dissertation is dedicated to Ruby Gwendolyn Babb and Anita Yvonne Babb-Bascomb for all of the memories, realities, and imaginings of strength and tenderness that have made our lives possible.

In memory of Wellington Selden Sr., Carmen Nicole Mitchell, and Vèvè Amasasa Clark

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Acknowledgments

As a little girl I hung on the stories, snippets, and unique expressions that floated through my family. My mother took me to the library where I sat at the feet of storytellers and raided the shelves weekly. Soon I began devouring history books, cultural pamphlets, music, performances, television programs and anything that might help me to understand the world around me and my place within it. The many calls between my schools and my mother taught me that truth is relative, discipline is necessary, and respect for knowledge should extend to respect for both structures of study and all of those who work within, without, and around them.

In choosing to become a scholar I learned to produce knowledge, not just consume it. This dissertation is both the culmination and the beginning of that lesson. With this in mind, I want to express my appreciation to all of the artists and cultural workers who shared their time and opened their creative spirits to me. A special thanks to Rupee whose artistry inspired this work, and whose music, advice, and support has sustained me throughout this process.

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Introduction

I don't think there has been anything in human history quite like the meeting of Africa, Asia, and Europe in this American archipelago we call the Caribbean. But it is so recent since we assumed responsibility for our own destiny, that the antagonistic weight of the past is felt as an inhibiting menace. And that is the most urgent task and the greatest intellectual challenge: how to control the burden of this history and incorporate it into our collective sense of the future.¹

*In plenty and in time of need when this fair land was young, our great forefathers sowed the seed from which our pride has sprung. A pride that makes no wanton boast of what it has withstood, that binds our hearts from coast to coast the pride of nationhood.*² Such pride extends well beyond the coasts of Barbados and continues to unite Barbadians across the world. It is a definitive characteristic of every Bajan.³ The seed from which it springs, however, has been blown across the trade winds of the Atlantic many times. The diasporic spore at the root of Barbadian pride is often overshadowed by centuries of English rule, followed by a masculinist nationalism whose forefathers sowed their seed to create an independent nation. Barbados has a history as “Little England,” the black island where colonialism was executed so well that the colonized not only accepted, but were proud of their hegemonic acceptance of English culture.⁴ This history is a myth, but the myth has been the starting point (and ending point for some) for much of the nation's cultural history and national identity. All other definitions either sprout from, are in response to, or in some ways have to get around the mythical notion of “Little England.” For centuries the respectability and modernity offered in the ideal of “Little England” has competed and worked in tandem with constructions of the Caribbean as a tropical, exotic, and erotic paradise. The nationalist movement used both the mastery of “Englishness” and a reclamation of African heritage in order to attempt to assert an independent national identity. Post-independence Barbados has relied on both of these prevalent notions—the respectable, educated, and modern and the exotic, pleasurable, and sensual—in defining and representing itself as an independent nation.

This project shows that post-independence, the Barbadian nation-state relies upon regionalism and transnationalism, and that its popular culture artists use diasporic resources to both promote and define a national identity. Such resources work in tandem with historical myths of the Caribbean, such that the allure of an “exotic” location works in service of and against redefinitions of Barbadian femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and nationality. Using Barbados as an example, I argue that national identity can be formed, reformed, and performed through the performances of gender and sexuality within a global pop culture market. Bodies have always been a constitutive part of representation in the Caribbean. Black bodies in particular have epitomized the complex discourses of identity in the region. Stuart Hall notes how many black cultures “have used the body—as if it was, and it often was, the only cultural

¹ Lamming, *Coming, Coming Home*, 25.

² These are the opening lines of Barbados's national anthem. See the Appendix for the full lyrics.

³ “Bajan” is the colloquial term for Barbadian.

⁴ One need only look at the problematic title of Sidney Greenfield's 1966 *English Rustics in Black Skin* as one example of this reputation.

capital we had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation.”⁵ As black populations begin to cash in on their cultural capital using popular culture, many also seek to redefine historical, gendered, and cultural practices. As Gina Dent writes, “These new cultural politics depend on our reconfiguring the field of representation, on creating another context for cultural and political activity as we reconstitute the ground of difference.”⁶ Representation then, becomes an arena where culture can be created, re-created, and presented to differing audiences.

I use Barbados as a site because of its specific history within global trade routes (people, money, resources, information); the gender initiatives of the state and social reactions to such initiatives; its position as a socially and economically stable postcolonial nation with few natural resources and a strong tourist economy; and the flood of popular music artists who are penetrating (or seeking to penetrate) into the global market.⁷ The project focuses on three artists in particular: I use Alison Hinds as a clear representation of the negotiations inherent in Barbadian femininity throughout time. She has successfully managed issues of respect, sexuality, and class within her performances, while maintaining and increasing her audience base. Rupert “Rupe” Clarke serves as an example of how Barbadian masculinity has changed post-independence and what such changes have to offer in terms of representing the nation to a global audience. And Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty’s whirlwind rise to global stardom shows the complexities inherent within the relationship between national representation and global celebrity, especially when each is built around differing standards of sexuality.

It is my hope that this project furthers the discourses of Caribbean studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and popular culture studies by showing the ways in which Barbados’s unique cultural history is an example of how diaspora, transnationalism and popular culture are part of identity formation in the postcolonial world. I believe that the performance framework is most appropriate to identify and investigate the cultural representations of the Caribbean region and Barbados specifically, and I use the performance framework to inquire into both the stage and quotidian performances of Barbadian identity. Given the mythical “exotic” ideal of the region, the performance of gender and sexuality is a large part of the formations and representations of national culture. Barbados’s history as a key point in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the base for British colonialism in the Caribbean, the first Caribbean nation-state to set up a women’s bureau in the 1970s, and a stable postcolonial nation still struggling to define itself within a global market it has been present within for centuries provides an excellent site for study.

Over a decade into the twenty-first century, Barbados still struggles to negotiate its history while mapping its future. The plethora of cultural representatives (specifically, but not limited to musical artists) serve as a ready force to carry the cultural labor of defining the nation. This cultural definition grows in tandem with political and economic identity. Such work involves sustained attention to the present global markets of representation in which Barbados is engrossed, and the historical networks that have helped to frame the nation. In order to define a national culture, one has to remap Barbadian identity to include the transnational and diasporic networks that have always sustained the national imaginaries. Popular culture is an ideal arena for such remapping. As the number of Barbadian artists seeking entry into the cultural industry

⁵ Hall, “What Is This ‘Black,’” 27.

⁶ Dent, “Black Pleasure, Black Joy,” 6.

⁷ See Bailey et. al., *Gender Relations in the Caribbean*, 3; Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 9-12.

on and off of the island steadily increases, the narratives of cultural identity expand to include a more diverse set of voices shaping Barbadian pride.

My focus here is on popular culture in part because of the ways in which it “roots” artists who wish to enter markets beyond the national boundaries. British-Caribbean cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall explains: “... in one sense, popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios that are the everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folk.”⁸ This allows artists to both “brand” the nation abroad while “keeping it real” at home. Through popular culture they are able to produce an image of “authenticity.” In today’s market popular culture defines an “authentic” Barbados through Alison Hinds’s respectable sensuality, Rupee’s propensity to overtly call on the name of the nation and its women, and Rihanna’s in your face sexuality. Barbados can be found wherever the language of these artists (not just their accents) is heard across the globe. As Stuart Hall reminds us, “The role of the ‘popular’ in popular culture is to fix the authenticity of popular forms, rooting them in the experiences of popular communities from which they draw their strength, allowing us to see them as expressive of a particular subordinate social life that resists its being constantly made over as low and outside.”⁹ Such “authenticity” grounds artists as they push into markets beyond the local borders, allowing them to present their national culture as something other than “low and outside,” but in tandem with popular cultures across the globe. It also allows these artists to define the “popular” through their audience reactions.

This project troubles “authenticity” by putting it in conversation with sincerity. Building upon the theoretical work of John Jackson and Lionel Trilling,¹⁰ I argue that what these performers and Barbadians more generally do is perform a sincere national identity. They build an identity through constant everyday practices that may or may not fall into an “authentic” ideal. The reception of their performances marks them as “authentic” or not, but the persistent efforts to perform a national identity marks one as sincere.

The “authentic” is a brand. It is the commodification of a myth that when used in popular culture serves to represent an ideal rather than a reality. The arena of popular culture is where one can shape an “authentic” ideal. As Hall notes this is part of what popular culture does:

popular culture, commodified, and stereotyped as it often is, is not at all, as we sometimes think of it, the arena where we find who we really are, the truth of our experience. It is an arena that is *profoundly* mythic. It is a theater of popular desires, a theater of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time.¹¹

This is precisely why popular culture is such a rich arena for issues of representation and identity politics, especially within the Caribbean. The mythic nature of popular culture allows for it to engage the myths of history and those of the present while imagining the future. In a moment when economic markets are increasingly led by transnational capital that is difficult to locate

⁸ Hall, “What Is This ‘Black,’” 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ Jackson, *Real Black*; Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*.

¹¹ Hall, “What Is This ‘Black,’” 32.

within any one nation-state apparatus, when the producers of economic and political power as well as knowledge structures are more and more elusive as their reach extends further into the domains of people's everyday lives, cultural production becomes a very salient way to sustain a community. For many postcolonial nations, cultural capital is the most reliable investment, because "culture enables people to rehearse identities, stances, and social relations not yet permissible in politics. But it also serves as a concrete social site, a place where social relations are constructed and enacted as well as envisioned. Popular culture does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it."¹²

Furthermore, the ways in which popular culture can constitute realities is one more reason that it is important in analysis of the Caribbean. Caribbean cultures are hybrid.¹³ I agree with Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Linden Lewis who contend that all cultures are hybrid (especially popular cultures in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries).¹⁴ This project does not debate that point. But the Caribbean region (and Barbados specifically) has been beholden to an overarching *ideal* of purity for centuries. This tropical ideal, first proffered by those enticing European settlers, has held its ground despite the hardships settlers faced, the brutality of the slave trade and agricultural culture of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and the political and economic struggles of the region throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. This project engages with the ideal of a pure form and the ways in which hybrid creolized realities interact with and design themselves in the image of a falsely pure ideal.

A large part of this ideal (and its falseness) relies on the gendered constructions of Caribbean society, wherein men occupy public spaces and women reside in completely unrelated private spaces. These gender ideals begin in a settler culture and become a prevalent image of the region's societies for centuries. Such rigid gender lines have been transgressed for centuries in the cross-dressing of Carnival celebrations and the work and play of the working classes. The strict order of gender within a cultural ideal of the region speaks to ideas of the purity of Caribbean culture.

In 1978 Peter Wilson posited a framework for ethnography in the Caribbean that was extremely reliant on understandings of gender. His model of respectability and reputation—wherein women were most concerned with respectability as defined by colonial powers and thus more tied to colonial interests, and men were defined by reputation defined indigenously by their peer groups—has been critiqued, answered, and refuted by more than a few scholars.¹⁵ I won't reiterate those critiques here except to say that Wilson's work seems to stem from a surface understanding of gender relations in the Caribbean, one that is biased by colonial ideals of gender. Such an understanding simply does not work in the Barbadian context. I believe that in post-independence Barbados femininity and masculinity are less polarized: they both rely on forms of reputation and respectability, they both are heavily founded in colonial models, but they have grown toward the notion of responsibility to individual people, to communities, to nation, and to the region. Conversations about and analyses of representations of Barbados are inextricably tied to this sense of responsibility. This project engages in colonial gender ideals

¹² Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 137.

¹³ See Price and Price, "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove" for a history of creoliste thought in Caribbean discourse.

¹⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Hall, "What is This 'Black'"; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Lewis, "Caribbean Masculinity."

¹⁵ See Sutton, "Cultural Duality."

insomuch as to give a historical grounding for Caribbean performances of gender in Barbados and their representations throughout the world.

METHODOLOGIES

This project is both a cultural history of post-independence Barbados and a cultural investigation into the processes of identity formation. My research is based on textual analysis. I use archival documents, photos, videos, songs, internet blogs, live performances, and interviews as well as traditional “texts” in order to understand staged and quotidian performances of identity. As an American-born Barbadian I am born of the same transnational diasporic space that I am studying. Much of my understanding of Barbados is coming from this place: the perspective of an observing participant.¹⁶ This familiarity is integral to both my interest in this project and the methodologies I employ. My observations as a participant in Barbadian culture and its greater transnational tradition are buttressed by archival research, visual analysis, interviews, personal correspondence, and various secondary texts.

The project is driven largely by interviews I conducted with popular performers including Alison Hinds and Rupee. The project is also supported by interviews with some of their predecessors such as The Mighty Gabby and Red Plastic Bag who are still very much a part of the performance scene. Interviews with seasoned veterans such as Gabby and Bag who began their careers in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, allowed me to hear experienced voices of Barbadian performance. The interviews are supported by conversations with current and former government cultural officers, Ronnie Davis and Elombe Mottley, lunch time observations, and rum shop opinions. All of these opinions reflect the standards that Barbadian performers have been and continue to be held to, and the direction of Barbadian cultural forms as a whole. They also give insight into the changing role of Barbadian performers within Barbadian society. It is my hope that these interviews have grounded the theoretical framework of the project in specific lived experience.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One, “From England’s Child to the People’s Nation,” explores the ways in which the historical myths of the island and the hopes and opinions of its inhabitants have engaged with post-independence realities. Here I give a brief overview of the demographics of the island, the colonial history that has led to the current demographics and power relations, and an analysis of the role that immigration and migration have played in forging a national Barbadian identity. This is where I attempt to lay out a profile of an ideal Barbadian identity or “Barbadian personality”: what the cultural values are, what the societal expectations are, as well as identifying the differences between the various Barbadian communities that form the nation. I say that this is an attempt because my argument is that Barbadian identity is not a fixed entity. It is constantly being created and negotiated. So in laying out a profile of this identity I focus on the forces and processes which create and negotiate the various ideas of what the nation of Barbados is and should be. As one of the forces that influences identity construction is time, this

¹⁶ Daniel, Yvonne. *Dancing Wisdom*, 269. The tradition of anthropology adopted the method of participant observation as a more responsible means of doing ethnography, as a means to enter into the subject community. Yvonne Daniel believes it necessary to take it one step further, to not only participate in order to observe, but to immerse oneself into the community and to observe and produce critical analysis as a part of that community, not just as an observer of it.

chapter focuses heavily on the period of independence between the 1950s and the 1970s in order to present a historically specific analysis.

This chapter is both broad and specific. It is broad in covering the economic, political, and cultural histories. It is specific in identifying how these histories have shaped a national identity. Migration will be a significant theme in this and the next chapter as both migration and immigration have shaped the nation. The immigration of specific European communities both willingly and unwillingly set the foundations of power relations on the island.¹⁷ The subsequent arrival of African populations then built the foundation for the demographics of the island. The state-encouraged and sometimes state-sponsored emigrations in the 1840s, 1890s, and mid-twentieth century built a population abroad who became foreigners in their host countries, and as time went on, in their home nation as well.¹⁸ The movement of people on and off of the island brought with it different ideologies such as Garveyism, a more militant trade unionism, and black nationalism. All of these factors laid the foundations for the social, political, and economic structures of the island.

Announcing itself as an independent nation in 1966, Barbados was heavily reliant on tourism which brought its own ideologies of self-determination, modernity, development, and commodity. Consumption patterns changed as the island earned its reputation as the most developed in the region. A simplistic critique of materialism would be inadequate to explain the consumption practices of the last fifty years. They are informed by transnational flows of capitalism, the production of differing desires, the popular market, and a need to identify, perform, and display a national identity. This identity is constantly being shaped and reshaped by Barbadians and their social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances in a way that makes Barbadian identity (and perhaps all postcolonial identities) complex. The cultural arena often expresses this complexity.

Chapter Two “Tuk a Drum Beat Across the World: Performing Barbadian Personality on and off ‘de Rock,”” locates the history of Barbadian performance, its social and political relevance, and the international flows of Barbadian music and Barbadian musicians. In looking at the historical performance traditions of the island I hope to show how performance has always been an important avenue for social commentary and a site where Barbadian performers produce, assert, and define a Barbadian identity. This chapter establishes the early international leanings of Barbadian performance and then returns to more local performance history. It explores the ways in which performance both on and off of the island helped to shape Barbadian identity around global and diasporic relations.

On a small island policed by militia with limited opportunities for armed rebellion, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cultural expression was an important site of resistance.¹⁹ In the early 1900s migration patterns both into and off of the island placed Barbados in a cultural conversation with the rest of the Caribbean, Britain, its empire, and North America. The musical result was a plethora of Barbadian (and other Caribbean) performers finding their place in the jazz world working with big names such as Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker. Musical styles indigenous to the Caribbean and to Barbados began to become slightly more

¹⁷ Sheppard, *The “Redlegs” of Barbados*, 1-32; Howard, *Economic Development of Barbados*, 1-10.

¹⁸ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 24.

¹⁹ Wiltshire, interview. According to artist Red Plastic Bag, the history of social commentary begins on the plantation with the practice of picong, which literally means cutting, and is a practice of telling jokes about someone to their face. Picong is similar to what North Americans call playing the dozens.

popular in the 1940s and 1950s. From the tuk band and spouge (phenomena indigenous to Barbados) to calypso, and American imports of soul, gospel, and pop music such as the Beatles, the musical landscape of Barbados was very diverse throughout the mid to late twentieth century. In spite of such diversity, calypso has been a mainstay in the Barbadian musical landscape. This discussion will be largely informed by interviews with prominent Barbadian calypsonians such as The Mighty Gabby and Red Plastic Bag.

The cultural conversations happening through Caribbean music have a relationship to migration patterns. In analyzing Barbadian migration I will draw on authors such as Mary Chamberlain, George and Sharon Gmelch, and Mary C. Waters who have all explored the attitudes and experiences of Barbadian migrants, and how these experiences have been gendered by the different standards and expectations of Barbadians over generations.²⁰ Ultimately this chapter explores how the hybridity of Barbadian identity and the migration of Barbadian peoples are producing cultural conversations in the pop market. I believe that the cultural hybridity of the immigrant experience has profound effects on both home and host nations.

In Chapter Three, “Caribbean Queen: Barbadian Femininity,” I explore a range of performances of Barbadian femininity through Alison Hinds. As “Caribbean Queen,” Alison Hinds serves as an embodiment of the diverse definitions of Barbadian femininity. Researchers such as Erna Brodber expose how the colonial ideal of femininity has always co-existed at odds with the material and cultural realities of Afro-Caribbean women.²¹ I believe that these two models of femininity – delicate, domestic, and unassuming versus strong and independent – come together in the persona of Alison Hinds. This chapter investigates the ways in which Alison Hinds performs a black femininity that includes both colonial structures of respectability and various African and Caribbean ideas of strength, independence, and adaptability.

The connection between quotidian performance and stage performance is most apparent in the idea of the “queen.” In physique, attitude, and performance Alison Hinds is the ideal queen, both inspiring and representing the people who populate her domain. She is the most recognizably Barbadian woman moving into the international pop market, representing both the nation of Barbados and the Caribbean region as a whole. But she also represents a particular form of black femininity that draws on both the ethics imbued by colonialism and various African and indigenous practices of femininity. She is sensual, but respectable. And most importantly she knows it. When asked what it means for her to be a queen, Alison Hinds responded: “Regardless of whether I’m on stage or not, my fans see me as the Soca Queen. So, you know, I have to always take that into consideration whether I’m paying bills or shopping in the supermarket or, you know, just doing regular stuff, people are still looking at me, people are still watching me and observing me.”²² It is not a performance persona that she chooses take off when offstage, but one that she has chosen to actively pursue in both her stage performances and the quotidian performances of everyday life. By approaching the performance of “queen” in the way that she does, Hinds receives the respect accorded that role both on and off the stage. She demands it with the various ways in which she presents herself to the world, and on the world stage she is able to represent the island of Barbados and the wider Caribbean by employing her queenliness as a representation of all the women she represents. Her performances of femininity become a national resource.

²⁰ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*; Gmelch, *Double Passage*; Waters, *Black Identities*.

²¹ Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, ix.

²² Hinds, interview with author.

Chapter Four, “Love You All: Caribbean Masculinity,” uses Rupert “Rupee” Clarke’s public persona as an example of Caribbean masculinity in order to interrogate stereotypes of Caribbean men, their relationships and attitudes toward Caribbean women, and how Rupee’s portrayals of masculinity have contributed to his success as a performer. It further interrogates how Rupert “Rupee” Clarke takes Barbadian culture to a wider market using a creative blend of distinctly Barbadian forms and those more popular with foreign audiences. Rupee is a homegrown artist, one that began performing in a local context and has since gone on to perform internationally. He is most well known for his love songs that reveal a deep respect and appreciation for women. As the child of HIV/AIDS infected parents, his lyrics bring a message of carefulness to the sensuality of the soca genre, as well as a deep respect for the Creator and the uncertainty of life. Rupee feels a responsibility to use his gifts in a socially productive manner. This chapter seeks to examine the ways in which he imbues his lyrics with various messages; how his attitude of responsibility affects his reception; and how his view of the relations between men and women has colored his career. Using love as a theoretical framework and temptation as an analytic, this chapter argues that Rupee represents a shifting definition of post-independence Barbadian masculinity, one which contrasts with other representations of Caribbean masculinity in the global market.

In Chapter Five, “‘That Rihanna Reign Just Won’t Let Up’: Stardom and the Politics of Representation,” I argue that the image of Rihanna is where stereotypes of the Caribbean meet pop culture expectations of young and sexy. I believe that Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty’s career is an excellent illustration of the contemporary pop market. Her public personality is constructed around the conventions of black American female R&B artists in particular and female pop artists more generally, but her break into the mainstream included hints of her Caribbean heritage. This chapter explores the relationship between national representation and global celebrity, by answering the question of what makes an icon. What allows one individual to stand in for a collective identity in the popular imagination? I analyze the conventions of female iconicity within the contemporary global pop market. What is the mold? How does this Barbadian artist fit into it and how is she reshaping it, if at all? Rihanna was signed to a major recording label at an early age. She has grown in the public eye over the course of her career and her striking changes in style reflect this. As she breaks into the fashion market and film industry and continues to promote herself under the banner of young and sexy, her reception around the world and in Barbados has changed. As the most well-known Barbadian in the world market, her iconicity complicates commonplace notions of representation.

Inherent in this conversation is the question of genre. One difference between soca artists such as Alison Hinds and Rupee and artists like Rihanna is the genres in which they perform. R&B and pop music presently have more currency than soca in the global market. In looking at how different audiences relate to these performers and how much cultural translation is necessary, one must be conscious of the limitations of genre and how each artist negotiates such limitations. The limitations of genre raise questions of the limitations of representation. Rihanna has gained recognition performing in a genre that is not indigenous to her home. In fact, to date Rupee is the only Barbadian artist to have been signed to a major label for music that is seen as indigenous to the island. Given the various different influences Barbadians are exposed to on the island, it is not surprising or unusual to see Barbadian artists engaging in many different genres. It only makes issues of representation that much more complicated.

How, then, does Rihanna represent the nation in her performances? What are the limitations of her iconicity when it comes to representing a national identity, especially if that

identity is constantly being re-imagined and reconstructed? How, if at all, is Barbados claiming her as a national icon? There is no lack of representations of Barbados in the popular market, if one knows where and how to look. I believe that Rihanna has found other, less overt ways to represent Barbados with her iconicity. Her work with the Barbados Tourism Authority and her acceptance of a cultural ambassadorship are just a few avenues in which to do this, but most importantly, I argue, that Rihanna uses a particularly Caribbean form of mimicry in presenting herself to the world.

Using Baudrillard's definition of the hyperreal, Chapter Six, "Remapping Bim," investigates the role of new media in national representation. All of these artists use the internet to promote themselves and to speak directly to their fans. I believe that for Rupee and Alison Hinds in particular, their internet audiences have a strong diasporic and transnational pull. The Caribbean diaspora is watching them. The wider African diaspora is looking at them. And those folk with transnational identities have a strong presence in their internet markets. The internet allows these artists to promote and represent Barbados to wider audiences, but it also links them to transnational identities: those people who know home to be other than where they are or recognize multiple homes (i.e. bloggers who list their locations as Denmark/Somalia, Hawaii/South Africa, or Maryland/Guyana born). By analyzing the web blogs and fan pages where they interact with their internet audiences I hope to demonstrate how both the artists and their audiences are using new technologies to expand conventional definitions of "home." I argue that new media is where these artists are best able to represent Barbados as something more than "Little England"; that they are able to construct a new imaginary through their interactions with new media; and that even this new imaginary still conforms to the exoticism and consumption within the history of Caribbean imaginaries, sometimes exacerbating them even more. I argue that in using new media to map Barbadian identity, representations of Barbados become inextricably intertwined and in some ways more important than the realities of Barbadian life.

Chapter One

From England's Child to the People's Nation

Three hundred years, more than memory could hold, Big England had met and held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted. Three hundred years, and never in that time did any other nation dare interfere with these two. Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England's children, and may it always be so.²³

In 1953 George Lamming earned his reputation as one of Barbados's most heralded literary talents with the release of his autobiographical fiction *In the Castle of My Skin*. The text is a coming of age story, of both the boy who grows into a young man, and a colony growing toward a nation-state. Lamming details his upbringing with delicate attention to the specificities of gender, color, class and status. In the voice of a nine-year-old narrator named G., he tenderly explains his mother's pain and how, as her child, he had come to embody his mother's hopes in the absence of his "father who had only fathered the idea of me."²⁴ G.'s personal narrative parallels that of the island's relation to "Big England." Barbados was England's child, but in order for the island to mature into a sovereign nation-state it would have to re-imagine itself as something more.

This chapter uses the popular literature of George Lamming and the official speeches of the nation's first Prime Minister, Errol Barrow, in order to illuminate the ways ordinary Barbadians invoke their own complicated cultural heritage, and the ways in which the colonial and state governments called upon this heritage to construct an ideal Barbadian national identity. I draw on the work of the foremost Barbadian novelist of his time and the first Prime Minister of the independent nation to argue that even in independence the nation relied on old discourses of gender. These men, as politician and writer, fit squarely within the discourse of "men of speech," one wherein "the iconic face of the nation was uncompromisingly masculine and male."²⁵ These discourses came from historical texts, academic dialogues, and public platforms that privileged male voices.²⁶ Both Lamming in his novels, and Barrow in his speeches, call for Barbados to be "something bigger" and "something more" than it was in the time of their writing. They speak of ways of life, a changing sense of community, and a remapping of the island's identity that includes its many historical influences as well as diasporic communities.

Using these sources I argue that, for most Barbadians, national identity is constituted by processes such as emigration and return between Barbados, other Caribbean islands, and European and North American metropolises; social, political, and economic relations between the island and its Caribbean neighbors; and the gradual growth through and away from the colonial history of "Little England." I argue that in the decades surrounding independence in 1966 Barbados negotiated between the island's colonial past and a black nationalist reclamation

²³ Lamming, *In the Castle*, 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora*, 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Later the "man of speech" discourse comes to include calypsonians. The ways in which women enter into these arenas are explored in more detail in chapter three.

of African heritage in order to both discover and create a unique Caribbean nation-state.²⁷ Such a negotiation was necessary in order for Barbados to become something more than a colony and take control of its own national destiny.

The struggle between Barbados's colonial past and a future as "something more" occurs most strikingly in the culture industry where a cultural identity has the two-fold purpose of maintaining the cultural heritage of the people and promoting the island in an inviting and profitable way in order to support the nation's tourist economy. As Barbadians constantly imagine and re-imagine their identity, the ideal becomes more and more intangible. The realization of becoming "something more" has proved an ever-elusive goal, even while serving as the driving force of post-independence identity formation.

In the Castle of My Skin is a text primarily about Barbados and its identity as "Little England." Offering one of the most explicit and salient examples of the sociopolitical ethos of its 1950s moment, *In the Castle of My Skin* relates the pride that common village folk held of being a part of such a "great" and "proper" British empire. Lamming illustrates how English settlers had come to the island bringing their culture, their habits, and their English characteristics, turning Barbados into "Little England." The island took on this identity, and Barbadians of all backgrounds used the title "with the pride of the villager who thought the name carried with it a certain honourable distinction."²⁸ Barbados was a smaller version of England, and as "Little England" it replicated the same social structures. In the beginning of the novel, the young characters present the notion that Barbados is "Little England" as something fixed, ahistorical, and affecting their entire outlook on the world. England and the British empire stands in for the world outside of Barbados's shores. After sneaking into the white landlord's yard to watch the landlord's family entertain visiting sailors one evening, the boys of the village sit contemplating the difference between their lives and the "big life" of the landlord:

"That's what Mr. Slime say he goin' to change," said Boy Blue. "He say time an' again there ain't no reason why everybody shouldn't have the big life."
"He won't change what is," said Trumper. "'Tis a question of what is."²⁹

For Trumper, what had always been, including race, class, and gender inequities, would always be. For him and the rest of the children, it is not a question so much of the history of the island or the ways in which its people built a unique identity, but a question of what *is*, and in their moment Barbados *is* "Little England." They do not question how the island of Barbados came to be associated with England, but they do dwell on this association as a source of pride. They are proud to be a part of "Little England" even if their own racial and class position in society does not afford them any other privileges than that pride.

In the end, the sale of the village land to the growing, rootless middle class brings sweeping social change to the lives of the villagers, and the only certainty is that something has

²⁷ Scholars such as Hilary Beckles, Curwen Best, and Richard Clarke make similar arguments. My hope is to further their arguments with a focus on culture and the culture industry. See Beckles, "Radicalism and Errol Barrow"; Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*; Clarke, "Roots."

²⁸ Lamming. *In the Castle*, 96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

to give. G. is growing up and the village is as well. As the plot unfolds the reader can see how the people of the village and the nation are moving to own their own land, to break through the boundaries of social status, to exercise more civic rights, and to control their own destinies. These efforts are a part of a larger appetite for change, and Lamming paints this change as inevitable. The story begins with the question of what *is*, but it ends with the question of what's *gotta be*.

By the mid 1950s it was becoming increasingly clear to all classes of Barbadians that their special paternal relationship to England may not always be. Over the next decade social, economic, and political circumstances convinced more and more of the island's population that it was not in their interest to remain England's child. Emigration and the nationalistic ideas that emigrants returned with; the rising middle class and the power, if not wealth, they began to exert; as well as the changing attitudes of English colonials who had previously seen Barbados as home, as their responsibility, all factored into a growing social expectation. This expectation fed off of political, economic, and cultural changes that occurred on the island, in the rest of the world, and in the island's relationship to that world. Anti-colonial movements throughout Asia, the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa brought a new political solidarity to the struggles of individual colonies and populations.³⁰ Economically Barbados (and much of the Caribbean) was developing a stronger tourist economy to replace the waning monocrop agricultural model which had supported the island for centuries. Because the societal and political structure was so deeply tied to the monocrop plantation economy, this economic change brought sweeping sociopolitical effects. It would be inaccurate to say that there formed a unified monolithic national ethos, but it would be just as fallacious to deny the growing, if indeterminate, fervor toward change.

In 1962, four years before national independence, Errol Barrow, a Barbadian politician and soon to be the nation's first Prime Minister, made his attitude toward the British Empire clear in the following statement addressed to Parliament:

I am sure that honourable members would forgive me and other members of the Cabinet if, as West Indians and if as persons who are looking forward to the eventual emancipation of the area from imperial rule under which we have suffered so long – and I make no apologies for stating unequivocally that I am anti-imperialist; as a matter of fact, even the leaders of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom are anti-imperialists in their declaration when we see the rapidity with which they are dissolving the British Empire.³¹

Indeed, in Barbados from the 1940s to the 1960s, colonialism's end was growing increasingly near in the minds of many. Those who feared this inevitable conclusion by and large represented a minority elite whose economic and social interests might be threatened by independence. For the majority of Barbadians colonial status represented a disadvantaged position in the world order, and it was time for Barbados to be more. For the masses of Barbadian society it was a matter of moving past colonial mimicry.³² Barbados had been "Little England" for too long, and

³⁰ This is evidenced in the Bandung Conference of 1955.

³¹ Barrow, "You cannot draw up an indictment against a whole nation" address to Parliament June 19, 1962 on the British suspension of the constitution of Grenada in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 25.

³² The variations between colonial mimicry and a distinct Caribbean mimicry will be addressed in more detail in chapter five.

it was time for “Little England” to grow up. Small as the island was, the people’s regional and diasporic consciousness placed them firmly in an anti-colonial movement that aspired toward something greater than what European empires had achieved. As Frantz Fanon urged in the conclusion to his 1961 *Wretched of the Earth*, “it is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man,” one that does “not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.”³³ For Barbados, this “something other” meant becoming something more than “Little England,” and this something more would represent the masses of black working Barbadians.

The aspiration to be “something more” demonstrates Barbados’s specific national history and that history’s relation to events, attitudes, and movements across the globe. As Fanon posited that the Third World was poised to become more than an imitation of Europe, in the 1950s and 1960s Barbados was drawing on a history of diasporic connections in order to redefine itself as something other than “Little England.” The specifics of what “something more” might look like remain murky as post-independence Barbados continues to negotiate between its two parallel histories—the colonial foundations and structures of Barbadian society, and diasporic relations—in order to construct and maintain a national identity.

THE LITTLE ENGLAND THAT COULD

Generations had lived and died in this remote corner of a small British colony, the oldest and least adulterated of British colonies: Barbados, or Little England as it was called in the local school texts.³⁴

Barbadian national identity is built around a mythic ideal.³⁵ Barbados is England’s oldest colony, and as such an ideal was first formed in the seventeenth century around the notion that Barbados was a part of England. The island in many ways served as a playground for a white planter class that may not have had the social status to compete in England, but could make their fortunes and gain some degree of respectability in the New World. This class was then followed by the working classes, usually Scottish or Irish, who could not afford to remain in England.³⁶ The rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade brought an influx of Africans which drastically changed the island’s demographics, but not its association with England. Even after Emancipation in the 1830s (especially after Emancipation) the colonial structure encouraged all Barbadians in the idea that they were a part of the British Empire. As early as the seventeenth century the two most prominent cultural influences, European and African, were already in contest in the everyday practices of Barbadians. Those in power, however, were English, and thus the ideal of Barbadian identity became inextricably tied to that influence, and the ideal became mythologized within the discourse of Barbados as “Little England.”

³³ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 254.

³⁴ Lamming, *In the Castle*, 17.

³⁵ See Clarke, “Roots” and Best, “Popular/Folk/Creative Arts.”

³⁶ Some of these working class people were “Barbadoesed.” Similar to being “Shanghaied,” these people were kidnapped and sent to Barbados to work, especially those in debt. See Sheppard, *The “Redlegs” of Barbados*.

Barbadian identity is based on this colonial history, but it is also molded by Barbados's relations to the world outside its shores. That world has entered through trade, immigration, emigration, the printed press, and later through tourism, radio, and various other mass media outlets. In this sense Barbados is a "big/small" place. Affectionately referred to as "de Rock," the island is only 166 square miles; roughly one fourth the size of Greater London. Yet Barbadians who have lived their entire lives on the island still get lost in its back roads, alleys, and gaps. Today some Barbadians boast that there isn't anything in the world that one couldn't get on the island, while others bemoan the limited opportunities and village attitude or small community mindset of some of the people.

These same "big/small" parameters shape the ideal of Barbadian identity. The influences that have constructed the national identity are myriad, coming from many directions, areas, and time periods. Yet the island's singular attachment to "Big England" and the material limitations of its size keep the ideal quite narrow. In many ways the large scope of Barbadian identity is constantly trying to squeeze into a narrow ideal that itself changes throughout time. This ideal has become a myth as it was proffered first by the colonial government and later in a different form by the independent government.

Barbados is the most easterly island in the Antillean archipelago of the Caribbean Sea. This coral landmass of 166 square miles currently supports a population of approximately 280,000 people. Indigenous peoples such as the Barranoid, the Arawaks, and the Caribs all inhabited and left the island at different points before it was "discovered" by European travelers. The Portuguese and the Spanish visited the island in the 1500s before the first British ship landed on its shores May 14, 1625. Barbados soon became one of the most treasured British colonies. Its eastern position made it an important post for the British Atlantic Slave Trade as well as a key location for administering colonial policy throughout the Caribbean region. Throughout the next few centuries Barbados never changed colonial hands and became known as an island fortress, a nickname encouraged by the presence of militia and at times the strong backing of the British Navy. By the 1650s the island had already earned its most popular nickname: "Little England."³⁷

Barbados's racial make-up changed drastically in the first hundred years of settlement, but the influence of the Atlantic Slave Trade stabilized it and set the foundation for race and power relations for centuries to come. As a young colony, the population of Barbados consisted largely of English emigrants. There was also a strong Irish presence and shortly thereafter Scottish as well. In the early-mid 1600s the economy was based on the tobacco crop which was worked by white indentured servants. This soon changed with the introduction of sugar cane in 1637 and the subsequent growth of the Atlantic Slave Trade. In 1655 Barbados's population included approximately 23,000 British subjects and 20,000 Africans.³⁸ By the time of the first census in 1712 the white inhabitants were numbered as 12,528 compared with 41,970 enslaved Africans.³⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century the island's population was overwhelmingly of African descent (90%). The treatment of both the African slaves and white indentured servants has been characterized in different ways at different points in the island's history, but most accounts say that it was generally "characteristic of a harsh and brutal age."⁴⁰ The island's size

³⁷ Hoyos, *Barbados: A History*, 25.

³⁸ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 19.

³⁹ Sheppard, *The "Redlegs" of Barbados*, 41. These statistics most likely under report the number of white inhabitants and they noticeably omit the free black population. There is no distinction made here between the white landowning class and the poor white population which had drastically different experiences on the island.

⁴⁰ Hoyos, *Barbados*, 76.

and landscape was not advantageous for maroon communities although underground networks did exist.⁴¹ Compared to many slave societies, Barbados did not have many instances of armed resistance with few exceptions, most notably Bussa's Rebellion of 1816. Bussa, an African born man enslaved in Barbados, organized his co-conspirators into a military force that mainly burned plantation crops before fighting both the local and imperial military forces. Though legendary, Bussa's rebellion was still an anomaly.⁴²

The Emancipation Act of 1833 changed the racial dynamics of the island. The white population on the island, already a minority, consisted primarily of an established plantocracy and poor whites, derisively referred to as "redlegs." The poor white population, who had previously enjoyed a niche in the militia, now found that their "racial superiority" meant very little without the distinction of "slave" and "free." The white middle class all but disappeared post-Emancipation. Those holding small plots of land were often bought out by the wealthier plantocracy. Many emigrated abroad to places such as Jamaica and the Carolinas where earlier Barbadian settlers had already migrated in the seventeenth century. A good deal of the middle class who remained, because they were now landless, entered into the poor white population. Land became a defining factor of wealth, and as plot sizes increased the organization of the society remained tied to a structure of racialized plantocracy and British style of rule.

Despite the class shifts among whites, the newly freed population remained under colonial rule after Emancipation. Colonialism imposed very stringent gender ideals that differed greatly from those that existed under slavery. As slaves, gender roles served the slave system. Slave-owners directed women in socializing enslaved children to serve while maintaining the kind of deformed equality the Angela Davis notes in the U.S. context.⁴³ Post-Emancipation, the formerly enslaved became colonial subjects, and as such the expectations of manhood and womanhood were based on the models of the colonizer. As Eudine Barriteau notes, many of these ideals were based on the liberalism of the Enlightenment period.⁴⁴ The colony of Barbados inherited the social expectations of specific gender performances modeled after the English gentleman and lady. In the decades after Emancipation, Barbadians reconstructed their society under a colonial model in which government, educational, and religious institutions worked to place women in the domestic sphere and to define "proper" men as productive workers and heads of the household.⁴⁵ This model was rarely achievable according to the material realities of the island where jobs that could support whole families were scarce for men, and most women were engaged in some form of the market economy. Such realities often led to migration in order for men (specifically) to find work that would enable them to fulfill the role of breadwinner.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Beckles, *Afro-Caribbean Women*, 10. The term "maroon community" refers to those Africans in the new world who escaped slavery and formed and defended their own communities. Most of these communities existed in mountainous regions where the terrain prevented their detection and aided their defense. Some of the most famous maroon communities existed in Jamaica, and the Jamaican government fought several wars with the maroons throughout the eighteenth century.

⁴² Twelve years after Santo Domingo produced the nation of Haiti, slaves in Barbados undertook one of relatively few revolts in the island's history. There were several leaders, but popular legend has placed an African born slave named Bussa at the center of the controversy. During Easter weekend of 1816 an organized rebellion broke out in which many plantations saw their crops burn and many lives were lost. For more information see Beckles, *Bussa*.

⁴³ Davis, "Reflections on Black Woman's Role," 89.

⁴⁴ Barriteau, "Liberal Ideology and Contradiction," 437.

⁴⁵ Barrow, "Caribbean Masculinity and Family," 342-343.

⁴⁶ The gendered patterns of migration will be explored more in chapter two.

Centuries of British colonialism posited impossible ideals for Barbadians, obscuring the histories that simultaneously constructed the ideals and made them unachievable for most colonial subjects. The ideals of gender, class, race, and ultimately empire are at the heart of the myth of “Little England.” A myth is a representation that distorts its history and is naturalized in its presentation. In his essay “Myth Today” Roland Barthes explains how “myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form.”⁴⁷ Nationalist discourse is the main form of the mythic ideal of Barbadian identity. In fashioning a Barbadian identity, subsequent Barbadian governments have relied upon the island’s connection to England, and later an African heritage. These histories have been distorted within national discourses in order to present a tidy and idyllic image of Barbados to its own people and to the rest of the world.

“Little England” was more than a nickname. It had cultural, political, and social implications. For centuries, Barbadians shaped their collective identity around this mythic ideal. The educational and religious structures of the island encouraged black and white, poor and wealthy Barbadians in the moral codes and practices of the Anglican Church.⁴⁸ To be middle-class, one would have to adopt the gendered positions of an Englishman or lady: their dress, their speech, and their family structures. Barbados’s reputation as “Little England” was earned through the mastery of these practices. Barbadians were known to be more “English” than the English, and in adopting “Little England” as an ideal identity Barbados also earned the reputation of being one of the most conservative societies in the Caribbean.

Politically it was advantageous to be “Little England,” and one of the reasons the name stuck is because of the island’s political value to Britain.⁴⁹ As the easternmost island in the Caribbean, Barbados was a strategic location and served as a focal point for colonial administration and defense throughout the British West Indies. To deal with England in the Caribbean was to deal with Barbados. Ideally this was a reciprocal relationship, wherein to deal with Barbados was to deal with England. The island relied on the British government and defense forces. The island’s political value to “Big England” made it worthy of defending. Surely England would not let its most prized colony suffer in any way. Because Barbados was such a valuable colony, the island enjoyed privileges that other colonies in the Caribbean could not exercise. Throughout Barbados’s history the elite classes practiced greater self-rule than elsewhere in the region as demonstrated when “in the constitutional reorganization of the British Caribbean in the later part of the nineteenth century, only Barbados managed to retain its representative Assembly.”⁵⁰ The island modeled its government on the Westminster model of England. In the same way that children model their behavior after their parents, Barbados as a whole practiced the mythic ideal of “Little England.” Even after independence that myth has informed the new nation’s efforts to define itself on the world stage.

⁴⁷ Barthes, “Myth Today,” 109.

⁴⁸ Other religious denominations were established on the island, but the British Anglican churches were most prominent for the first few hundred years of Barbados’s history.

⁴⁹ This reference would remain popular long after “Big England” united with Scotland and Wales to form Great Britain in the 1707 Act of Union.

⁵⁰ Knight, *The Caribbean*, 283.

“THE PRIDE OF NATIONHOOD”⁵¹

’Tain’t no joke,’ the shoemaker said; ‘if you tell half of them that work in those places they have somethin’ to do with Africa they’d piss straight in your face.’
 . . . “’Tis true,’ said Bob’s father, ‘no man like to know he black.’

Every child in the village had a stock response for the colour, black. We had taken in like our daily bread a kind of infectious amusement about the colour, black. There was no extreme comparison. No black boy wanted to be white, but it was also true that no black boy liked the idea of being black.⁵²

The characters of Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* display Barbadians’ complex relations to race. As a colony, part of the pride Barbadians held in being “Little England” stemmed from racial ideologies. Being “Little England” meant being other than or more than black. In moving away from that colonial identity a pride in blackness became entrenched in ideas of nationhood. The gradual shift from colony to nation-state happened in tandem with a shift in the racial ideologies of the island. This shift was influenced largely by Barbadians interactions with the rest of the African diaspora.

Migration patterns imported different modes of thinking from the U.S. and other Caribbean islands. The movement of people from island to island within the Caribbean brought more defiant racial ideologies to Barbados. In 1919 John Beckles and Israel Lovell established Barbados’s first branch of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association whose “platform was largely concentrated on teaching the virtues of black solidarity, black history and Pan-Africanism. The local Garveyites recognized that black unity was an imperative in the quest to transform their wretched, degraded, conditions.”⁵³ As racial and class tensions increased within Barbados’s limited economy, the UNIA would grow to include six branches on the island. By 1924 Barbados’s first political party, the Democratic League, was formed. While support for Garveyism spanned the class spectrum, the liberal, middle class socialist Garveyites supported the industrial wing of the Democratic League, also known as the Working Man’s Association.⁵⁴

These sociopolitical associations represented a growing aggression throughout the Caribbean region, which reached its height in the industrial unrest of 1937. After various labor struggles throughout the Caribbean and the silencing of an organizer, Clement Payne, on the island of Barbados, many of the working class were ready to take action. On July 26, 1937 disgruntled workers attacked businesses in the heart of Bridgetown, the island’s capital city. The target of the commercial district was meant to symbolize an attack on white wealth and power. The actions, in some ways, were a part of larger unrest in the region and stand out as one of few events of organized violence in Barbados’s history.⁵⁵

As with many other colonial populations, the World War I and World War II period saw an increase in movement across the globe, which is one reason why “nationalism and class consciousness increased tremendously in the years between 1919 and 1939, the tantalizing war

⁵¹ Barbados National Anthem. See appendix.

⁵² Lamming, *In the Castle*, 126.

⁵³ Worrell, *Pan-Africanism in Barbados*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ See Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom*.

years.”⁵⁶ As many joined the war efforts in the British ranks, they experienced a growing sense of disillusionment in the colonial system and in their own supposed “Englishness” both at home and abroad.⁵⁷

As a colony of Great Britain, WWII brought many changes to the island of Barbados. Proud of their status as “Little England,” loyal to the mother country, and oftentimes out of economic need, many migrated to Europe to join the British ranks. As Barbadian statesman and World War II veteran Errol Barrow put it, “West Indians were not reluctant in answering the call, whether in the armed services or in factories or on the beaches . . . where the conflict was being waged the West Indians were there.”⁵⁸ Barbadians fought on the side of the British crown where colonial rhetoric had told them they belonged, but World War II also heightened racial awareness. In Europe the trappings of “Little England” disappeared behind the dark skin of colonial status. Black Barbadians, like most of the colonials serving in European militaries, were met with racism in the ranks. Within the war, colonial powers made no secret of their disdain for black soldiers: “First is the fact this inequality was noticed and resented openly by the men... Second, and perhaps more significantly, is the fact that the men possessed an unbroken dignity, despite three centuries of British colonial rule.”⁵⁹ Barbadians within the British ranks continued to display a deeply seeded pride in their identity, even while lamenting their treatment.

As black West Indians and Africans met within the British ranks, they were all British colonials, and Barbadians’ reputation as sons and daughters of “Little England” lost much of its currency. The shock of finding that one is not a part of the British motherland, receiving the bombshell that one is in fact the illegitimate heir of empire entitled to nothing but scorn and exploitation is one experience that black soldiers underwent together as Winston James notes when he writes “a pan-Caribbean identity had emerged out of the crucible of war.”⁶⁰ The soldiers’ status as colonials set them apart from “Big England.” This status set them outside the purview of Great Britain’s notions of modernity.

Modernity marks the end of a process through which populations domesticate landscapes, innovate new technologies, and most importantly learn to adapt to new and old conditions in order to shape a collective vision of themselves and their world. In analyzing C.L.R. James’s appendix to *Black Jacobins*, David Scott notes that “For James ... The Caribbean, in other words, is not merely modern; it is modern in a fundamentally inaugural way. And it is this inaugural modernity, he suggest, that lends to the Caribbean its distinctive (perhaps distinctively paradoxical) character.”⁶¹ Mimi Sheller’s assertions that the Caribbean provided the material resources and physical and ideological labor of Western modernity coupled with James’s assertions that the region is “modern in a fundamentally inaugural way,” make the rhetoric of Great Britain’s modernity that more problematic when West Indians unite under the British flag in a world war.

Achille Mbembe writes that modernity, as written by the western tradition to which Great Britain ascribes, includes “Westernism” as a constitutive part of what it means to be modern, and

⁵⁶ Knight, *The Caribbean*, 289.

⁵⁷ Hoyos, *Barbados*; Sheppard, *The “Redlegs” of Barbados*; Beckles, *Afro-Caribbean Women*.

⁵⁸ Barrow, “Federation and the Democratic way of life” statement to Parliament on 20 June 1962 in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 47.

⁵⁹ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 60.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶¹ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 125.

that, in Western eyes at least, modernity has not truly happened elsewhere.⁶² The labor of black populations has been essential to a European performance of the modern, yet the modern West writes their identities out of this modernity, except as labor. Westernism says that black people are not modern, cannot be modern, but are essential to defining modernity. In the Western mind, they represent what modernity is not, and thus help to clarify what modernity is. Mimi Sheller displays how this relationship to modernity is even more specific to the Caribbean region. Sheller writes “the imagined community of the West has no space for the islands that were its origins, the horizon of its self-perception, the source of its wealth.”⁶³ The experience of the World Wars made this relationship starkly visible to the black West Indian soldiers fighting within Britain’s ranks.

In the 1940s Great Britain was a world superpower. Its involvement in World War II on the side of the Allies was a testament to its supposed greatness. The Allies were fighting for democracy, to save humanity from the Axis powers’ fascist efforts at world domination. What Barbadians and other West Indians found in wartime Great Britain was that their association with the British did not give them the same privileges of status. The very nature of their colonial association set them outside of the “Greatness” of Great Britain.

Previously, Barbados’s reputation as “Little England” carried connotations of modernity; such a little place served as a satellite of Great Britain’s assumed greatness. This association eased the acrimony of the lack of freedom that colonial status implied and enacted. But in the racialized experiences of the 1940s (WWII, a growing anti-colonial movement, and black international radicalism), the seeds of discontent had been sown and Barbados as a nation sought to forge its own identity. The men that served in that war created for themselves a new identity as soldiers, but they returned home to a different fight than the one they had set out for. They began the fight for nationhood.

On the surface it would seem that Barbadian men “fathered the idea” of the nation. Under the colonial system masculine ideals were embodied by the figure of the English gentleman: an upperclass, propertied, well-educated married man. On the island, however, most men did not have the material realities to perform the ideal, and masculine practices were carved out of a need to assert control within a colonial context. Often these practices included control over and aggression toward women as a means of defining themselves as men. Aviston Downes, in his study of constructs of masculinity within Barbados, notes how “by 1920 many West Indian black men, influenced by the ideology of black nationalism, had begun to intensify their quest for human dignity rooted in racial integrity, social justice and economic enfranchisement. They were (and perhaps still are) far from fully disavowing constructs of masculinity predicated on aggression and the subjection of women but, ideologically, they had started to grow up.”⁶⁴ Such growth, however, was still couched in the patriarchal notions of early black nationalism and grew under the precepts of war and the role of man as soldier and protector. Although Barbadians were questioning their “Englishness” within the contexts and experiences of World War I and World War II, the disruption of their English identity did not necessarily disrupt the gendered constructs within that identity. The new impetus for self-definition in the form of a national identity was still shaped by the idea that men were “natural” rulers. The racialized and gendered experiences of the war (the war effort is generally associated with the men who served as

⁶² Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 10.

⁶³ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 1.

⁶⁴ Downes, “Boys of the Empire,” 131.

soldiers and mess men) served as an impetus toward self-definition, but in terms of gender at least, that self-definition was still based on a colonial model.

Despite the drastic changes that a second world war brought to ideas of internationalism and nationalism, there was little new about the 1940s. The gender roles were not new. The racism of the 1940s was not new. The internationalism of WWII, in many ways, had already existed, but the racism that black soldiers experienced in WWII Europe and the international perspective that those experiences created were the circumstances that changed their historical outlooks, especially when put into the context of the nationalism of the period coupled with ideologies of modernity. The relationship between the new change in outlook and the racialized experiences of war can be explained by Benedict Anderson's definition of nationalism and its relation to racism. Anderson, in his seminal text *Imagined Communities*, writes "the fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome capitulations: outside history."⁶⁵ For black communities who were finding commonalities in their histories, who were looking to define their destinies beyond their historical and present experiences of racism, WWII became an inspirational period of nationalism.

In some ways the nation of Barbados existed long before the nation-state. National consciousness varied across the lines of race and class, but mainly centered on the pride of being "Little England." The impetus for the nationalism of the 1940s may have been based on the experiences surrounding the WWII period, but the nation-states that it would produce would have to deal with colonial, regional and specific local histories. Anderson writes "if nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny."⁶⁶ The nationalism of the 1940s relied on a drive for communities to control their own destinies. Barbados's history as England's oldest colony had constructed its "immemorial past" as part of the British Empire, but it was up to Barbadians to define their own future. The reality of the nation-state was still not a priority as much as achieving the power to define the nation's identity and ultimately the nation's destiny. Defining nationhood was one way in which to assert identity, a (strained) sense of social equity, and in many ways Caribbean humanity in the modern world. A Barbadian nation-state would have to modernize its reputation as "Little England" in order to change its perception within the increasingly internationally focused world.

Rebuilding a Barbadian identity that did not focus on British colonialism would necessitate an international focus on Barbados's history. The population of Barbados does not include any indigenous peoples so that each community on the island has been transplanted and has had to make a home for themselves on the 166 square mile rock. This transplantation is a constitutive part of Barbadian history, as Mary Chamberlain asserts when she writes "Barbados was created out of a rootlessness."⁶⁷ She goes on to explain that the Africans and Asians brought to the Caribbean region were brought into an epistemological vacuum. As Homi Bhabha explains "the nation [then] fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor."⁶⁸ Being Barbadian meant not being lost. In claiming

⁶⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 149.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 11-12.

⁶⁷ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 19.

⁶⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 200.

that national identity, one was able to “set down roots” and make a place for oneself. The bulk of the population of Barbados was not some lost tribe robbed of their history; they were Barbadians with centuries of history on the island. They were connected to, but distinguishable from their brethren and sistren throughout the Caribbean Basin, and they were distinguishable by a set of attitudes, what Prime Minister Owen Arthur and scholar Richard Clarke define as a “Barbadian personality.”

The Barbadian personality, like many national identities, is articulated through the metaphorical language of Caribbean unity, pride in both a “roots culture” and modern sophistication, and later a reclamation of African heritage and connection to the broader African diaspora. These ideas are widely disseminated through cultural forms, social interactions and political rhetoric, so much so that “Barbadians ‘intuitively’ know what an Arthur or a Barrow is speaking about, not because the discourse of nationalism has merely held up a mirror to Barbadians in which they can find their reflection but because Barbadians have been encouraged to reflect the images found in the discourse of nationalism and from which they have derived their sense of identity.”⁶⁹ The ideal of “Barbadian” is a performance to aspire toward. Those from the most rural areas of the northern-most parish of St. Lucy to the most urban of southern St. Michael, men and women, upper class to the working class, of every race and color are encouraged to strive toward an ideal identity: Barbadian. Critiques of the nation are comments on how it has strayed from the path toward this constructed ideal; an ideal constructed by rootlessness, relation, the island’s colonial past, aspirations of independence, and its neocolonial present.

Although the realities of Barbadians make it hard to pin down a concrete definition of Barbadian identity, the ideal of what it means to be a Barbadian still carries weight. It is solid enough for Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley to assert that the fact that statesman and first Prime Minister of the island “Errol Barrow was a deep, passionate and unwavering Barbadian is impatient of debate. He was unapologetically Barbadian as any person one could ever hope to meet.”⁷⁰ Manley leaves any details of what it might mean to be “unapologetically Barbadian” open for interpretation, or more accurately, open to assumption.

A nation is, at its base, a collection of people who identify with each other.⁷¹ A nation is an identity construct, and identities are built around various imaginaries—press, religion, race—but each identity defines an individual within a community. Identity is a matter of placing individuals within their “people.” As Barbados moved toward independence, popular attitudes toward the “people” changed. This change manifested most clearly in literature. Toward the beginning of *In the Castle of My Skin* Lamming paints the sentiments of the folk in the village, the divisions in the community, and their complicated allegiances. In presenting the perspective of those in society’s liminal spaces such as the black overseer, that middleman between the respectable white landlords and the common village folk, or the educated civil servants striving to leave behind their humble origins, Lamming shows

the image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don’t like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 336.

⁷⁰ Manley, Introduction to Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 14.

⁷¹ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*; Goldberg, *The Racial State*; Knight *The Caribbean*; Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*.

The language of the civil servant. The myth had eaten through their consciousness like moths through the pages of ageing documents. Not taking chances with you people, my people. They always let you down.⁷²

Although the “people” weren’t to be trusted, in the tradition of negritude to which this text belongs, the speaker still identifies them as “my people.” In the late 1950s into the 1960s a growing sense of nationalism transformed this sense of “my people” into a racialized consciousness. Efforts to strengthen the regional community and the processes of emigration and return in particular forged this change in attitude. As the nation of Barbados moved toward a nation-state, Barbadians redefined their identity. The assertion of “Little England” began to compete with the racialized consciousness of black nationalism and anticolonialism where class divisions, although still present, did not preclude a sense of racial solidarity.

A good deal of what it means to be Barbadian has been shaped by the Barbadian diaspora, the Caribbean diaspora, and the African diaspora. Emigration has placed Barbadians across the globe most notably in Britain, U.S. cities, Canada, and throughout the Caribbean region. As relatively small communities in large metropolises, island distinctions lose some of their currency and many Barbadians interact with Jamaicans, Trinidadians, and others to form West Indian communities abroad. Politicized by their surroundings they form lasting bonds with other black communities. In a 1962 statement to Parliament, Errol Barrow, while acknowledging the radicals of the region, states plainly that

there is one group of Westindians, quite apart from the students who were studying in the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom. This group of persons existed in the areas of New York, Boston, and Chicago; those persons had been brought together by the events in the Westindies of 1937 and have stuck together right through the dim period of the Second World War, taking a very active interest in every political development in the British Caribbean area and, indeed, in a wider context, in the Caribbean as a whole.⁷³

The politicized working classes provided a base for the nationalism that would create an independent nation. Barrows goes on to explain that while Barbados had never depended upon British or the U.S. governments for funding, the remittances of West Indians abroad sustained the island especially in the period between WWI and WWII.⁷⁴

The Barbadian and larger West Indian communities abroad have impacted the islands from which they come. Migration has helped to define the understanding of a Barbadian nation-state, and ultimately a national identity. It is important to understand that “there has scarcely been a Barbadian family who has not been touched, and shaped, by migration and its absences, at a literal, metaphysical, cultural and historical level.”⁷⁵ In this way migration, exile, and return are an integral part of Barbadians’ lives. Migration has shaped family structures, gender roles, and

⁷² Lamming, *In the Castle*, 19.

⁷³ Barrow, “Federation and the Democratic way of life” statement to Parliament on 20 June 1962 in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 45.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 113.

notions of community, but migration has wider implications as well. As Mary Chamberlain explains,

the migration narratives of the Caribbean ran parallel with the rhetorical metaphors of nation-state and Empire, and have helped to shape, and continue to shape, the culture of the Caribbean at home and abroad. Indeed, the story of modernity is one of several, *unfinished* migrations, which began in the Caribbean, and which continue.⁷⁶

Such a phenomenon is a two-way flow. The experiences that emigrants have in Barbados shape how they enter into the rest of the world. The social conservatism of the island inhibited many from social activism while “exile made it easier for many of these young migrants to embrace radical ideas precisely because the social pressures abroad were not as great as they were at home.”⁷⁷ Younger migrants and their children are among the most radical having experienced both a Barbadian upbringing and the social expectations and pressures of their hostlands.⁷⁸

The relation between a growing racialized consciousness in Barbados and migration narratives manifests in one of the main characters of Lamming’s novel, *Trumper*. As the oldest of the boys in the neighborhood, Trumper’s words and attitudes had always carried extra weight with his companions. By the end of the novel, “Trumper had emigrated to America and no one could tell what he would become. Most people who went to America in such circumstances usually came back changed. They had not only acquired a new idiom but their whole concept of the way life should be lived was altered.”⁷⁹ Out of all the boys in the story, Trumper has the lightest skin. He is “clear skin” as some Bajans would say, but his exposure to American racism teaches him his blackness, and redefines his notion of his “people.” Upon his return to the island this change in consciousness is the first thing the village notices and is partly reflected in the rebellious uniform of a zoot suit. The same young boy who had only years earlier confidently asserted that no one “could change what is,” has a new lesson to teach. After listening to Trumper’s favorite song, Paul Robeson’s rendition of “Go Down Moses,” the narrator G. receives his first explicit lesson in racial identity, in “blackness.” As he listens to Trumper speak of his “people” he admits, “he knew I was puzzled. This bewilderment about Trumper’s people was real. At first I thought he meant the village. [But] this allegiance was something bigger.”⁸⁰ Trumper attempts to explain:

“If there be one thing I thank America for, she teach me who my race was. Now I’m never goin’ to lose it. Never never.”

“There are black people here too,” I said. I hadn’t quite understood him.

“I know,” said Trumper, “but it ain’t the same. It ain’t the same at all. ‘Tis a different thing altogether. ‘Course the blacks here are my people too, but they don’t know it yet. You don’t know it yourself. None o’ you here on this islan’ know what it mean to fin race. An’ the white people you have to deal with won’t ever let you know.”⁸¹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

⁷⁷ James. *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 77.

⁷⁸ See chapter two, pages 46-50, for a detailed example.

⁷⁹ Lamming, *In the Castle*, 229.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 303-304.

⁸¹ Ibid., 304.

Trumper is not claiming Americanness. He is a Barbadian. That is still recognizable, but Trumper is different now. He claims a life knowledge he learned as a black man in America. He claims the pain that taught him the knowledge. Knowing his race has made him bigger than the island he belongs to. In bringing this attitude, this knowledge, back to Barbados he makes the idea of Barbados bigger than it used to be. Trumper is still Barbadian, but he also recognizes himself as a black man, and he recognizes Barbados as a black nation. Things had changed in the village and things had changed in the world. Through the character of Trumper, the village could plainly see how these changes were interrelated. The “people” was an entity now defined by a racial consciousness. Trumper’s understanding of his “people” was a new imaginary, a new community, a wider black nation that he could apply as a young man in the midst of a changing young Barbadian nation. Listening to Paul Robeson, Trumper had found the language to demand that what had always been, be no more. As he listened to that strong deep voice on a small music box, the rest of the world melted away and all he could hear was “let my people go.”⁸²

This is the attitude that finds its way into Parliamentary debate in the early 1960s. After the 1961 elections which brought Errol Barrow’s Democratic Labour Party (DLP) into power and the demise of the Federation of the West Indies in early 1962, Barbados was still left to define its place in a changing world. The minority classes that opposed independence, and the rising middle classes who had been taught to aspire toward a colonial ideal, were still a present force in politics and society. But with a new racialized consciousness Errol Barrow espoused the cause of the black masses of Barbados. In critiquing his opponents he strongly asserted that

they underestimate the intelligence of the masses of this country, because the masses of this country want independence. The masses of this country have too much sense to aspire to get into company which is intellectually inferior to the African heritage; but we have a bunch of humbugs in this country whose only ambition is to identify themselves with the hegemony, the presiding power, and, if they get into their company, they feel that some of this prestige will rub off on them.⁸³

Even as “Little England” the governance of Barbados had been performed by an elite few who were thoroughly entrenched in British culture, British social structures, and who had exercised their power to protect their privilege. But throughout the 1940s, the 1950s, and especially in the 1960s new ideologies of racial and class consciousness gave the masses of Barbados a new impetus toward self-determination. In conversation with their diasporic counterparts they understood what Fanon meant when he wrote, “it is a question of the Third World starting a new

⁸² Lamming’s mention of this song is deliberate. As a dark skinned, highly visible, American activist, entertainer, linguist, lawyer, athlete, Paul Robeson represents the black consciousness that Lamming displays through the character of Trumper. Robeson’s anti-colonial activism and his focus on international and domestic issues speaks to the kind of connections that Trumper is making through his travels abroad, and the meaning those connections have as he returns to Barbados. The song “Go Down Moses” is widely associated with Robeson and is noted as a slave song. The lyrics (Go down Moses/Way down in Egypt’s land/Tell old Pharaoh/Let my people go) are easily adapted to anti-colonial causes. Using Paul Robeson’s “Go Down Moses” as a marker of Trumper’s black consciousness, Lamming plays on a diasporic history of oppression at the hands of foreigners as well as collective defiance. See also Lamming, “Colonialism and the Caribbean Novel,” 276; Kortenaar, “Lamming’s *In the Castle*.”

⁸³ Barrow, “This is the parting of the ways” speech in Parliament 4 Jan 1966 introducing resolution for Brit to convene Bim mind. conference in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 77.

history of Man.”⁸⁴ The majority of Barbadians were ready to play their part, but there still remained factions that clung to colonialism like a child to its mother’s skirt.

The colonial system had clearly worked in the interest of the largely white merchant elite and old plantocracy class. The elite’s sense of national ethos was based on their control of resources, and historically their control of the island’s resources connected them to an international network of trade and power. A broad-based nationalism was a threat to the elite’s economic and social hegemony, but the middle class intelligentsia had also become tied to colonial structures. Barbadian psychiatrist Ezra E. H. Griffith displays this relationship in his memoir, *I’m Your Father, Boy*, where he relates a 1950s conversation between the men of the village and one of their educated peers nicknamed Professor:

“Gentlemen,” he intoned seriously, “you are offering an hypothesis, upon which we are clearly not agreed. Furthermore, there is clearly little logic to your claims.”

“Professor, as usual, you talking down to we. But you en mek nuh blasted point yet. British politicians and the Colonial Office don’ give two shites ‘bout black people in Barbados. An’ you know dat is a fact.”

“My god man, there is no need to resort to obscene language to make your point. There is virginal youth in our midst.”

“You tink dis boy never heard a curse word? You trying to change the subject. De British colonize yuh ass, and you talking like dem. But deh don’ want yuh.”⁸⁵

Professor’s command of the colonial language did not give substance to what he had to say. He was a recognizable individual in the village, a part of the community, but his educated status placed him outside of the world in which the majority of the villagers lived. Professor’s choice to use “proper” English displayed an affinity toward the colonial structure that, by the 1950s, the rest of the men had grown to resent. Professor’s position betrays how the intelligentsia’s rise to a middle class position gave them promise in the colonial structure. It gave them something to lose in a broad-based national movement, but the common folk remained unimpressed. Leadership aside, the nationalist movement in Barbados gained its support from the working classes who had been actively agitating for change since the 1930s.

Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* relates this history on the social level. The village includes a shoemaker, teachers, domestic servants, children, and a long retired elderly couple known only as Ma and Pa. The picture he presents is not unlike that of Griffith’s memoir: specific in the portrayal of the idiosyncrasies of a community, yet typical in its depiction of Barbadian life. Both depict a close knit community with various connections to a world marked as outside their daily lives. By characterizing *In the Castle of My Skin* as autobiographical fiction, Lamming is able to wed the authority of an autobiography with the creative license of fictional writing. Because the story spans several years, the voice of the narrator grows as the plot progresses. Lamming’s character G. grows from a boy to a man while witnessing Barbados shift away from colony and toward nation-state.⁸⁶ This text has become a classic in Caribbean literature and was one of the first of its kind taught in the region’s schools. Its reception speaks both to the talent of the author and the embrace of local culture which marked Barbados’s growth

⁸⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 254.

⁸⁵ Griffith, *I’m Your Father, Boy*, 81.

⁸⁶ See Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography*.

away from the “Little England” identity. The story of an average young man, in a typical Barbadian village, from a working class background came to represent Barbados in the 1950s. *In the Castle of My Skin* is able to do this largely because it gives a gendered, racialized, and classed depiction of Barbados from the social perspective of the working classes who were pushing for change.

By 1966, change was imperative for this working class. Speaking at the Barbados Constitutional Conference in London in July 1966 Errol Barrow makes it plain:

In our view, there can be no question whether Barbados is ripe and ready for independence. Three centuries of history answer that question in the affirmative. You have never had to shore up our finances you have never had to maintain or preserve public order among us. Even now, without the help of thousands of our best citizens, your own hospital and transport system would be in jeopardy.⁸⁷

Barbados had been the good, loving, self-governing child of Great Britain for centuries, but the tide had changed. After three hundred years it was time for that child to move on its own. Change meant confusion for some, pride for others, but whether or not any individual faltered in their faith of the nation’s readiness, change was certain. Just like the boys sitting on the beach in Lamming’s novel it became a question of what’s *gotta be*. “When yuh touch the sea with yuh toe you know there gottabe wet,”⁸⁸ and when a country rules itself for so long you know there *gotta be* independence. As Errol Barrow had warned in January of 1966, “no one is going to be contented to be treated as second class citizens in perpetuity.”⁸⁹ In his address to the Barbados Constitutional Conference that July, Barrow made it quite clear that the time for independence had come, and he gave his guarantee that “my Government, I assure you, Sir, will not be found loitering on colonial premises after closing time.”⁹⁰

“WE WRITE OUR NAME ON HISTORY’S PAGE WITH EXPECTATIONS GREAT”⁹¹: INDEPENDENCE

“I was thinkin’,” he said, “how the Independence would change all that wipin’ out, change everythin’ that confuse.”

Powell’s pride had been aroused. His voice came loud and fretful.

“Change my arse,” he shouted, “is Independence what it is? One day in July you say you want to be that there thing, an’ one day in a next July the law say all right, from now you’s what you askin’ for. What change that can change? Might as well call your dog a cat an’ hope to hear him meow. Is only words an’ names what don’ signify nothin’.”

⁸⁷ Barrow, “No loitering on colonial premises” address to the Barbados Constitutional Conference in London July 1966 in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 89.

⁸⁸ Lamming, *In the Castle*, 130.

⁸⁹ Barrow, “This is the parting of the ways” speech in Parliament 4 Jan 1966 introducing resolution for Brit to convene Bim mind. conference in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 71.

⁹⁰ Barrow, “No loitering on colonial premises” address to the Barbados Constitutional Conference in London July 1966 in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 90.

⁹¹ Barbados National Anthem. See appendix.

The politics of freedom had always haunted Powell's imagination.

“Free is how you is from the start, an’ when it look different you got to move, just move, an’ when you movin’ say that is a natural freedom make you move. You can’t move to freedom, Crim, ‘cause freedom is what you is, an’ where you start, an’ where you always got to stand.”⁹²

Released in 1960, George Lamming's *Seasons of Adventure* presents a character so obsessed with the meanings of freedom all else seems irrelevant. Setting the novel in the fictional Caribbean island of San Cristobal, Lamming has posited the character of Powell as an everyman with an attitude based on distrust, paranoia, and an intense yearning for control of his own destiny. At the time of its release Lamming's home of Barbados was seeking freedom, or at least a greater control of its affairs, coupled with those of its Caribbean neighbors.⁹³ Since the 1930s there had been a growing fervor for change away from the colonial model toward a model where more of the population would have the freedom of self-determination. By the 1960s independence wafted like a whisper throughout the Caribbean. Ostensibly, independence from colonial powers would lead to freedom, but definitions of what freedom would look like, or how average people would experience it, often got lost in the movement away from colonialism.

On November 30, 1966, the British Union Jack came down and replacing it, Barbados's own national flag waved in the wind.⁹⁴ Little England was now an independent Barbados. When leading the nation toward independence, Errol Barrow was very clear that the country was not looking for hand outs. In fact Wynter A. Crawford of the Congress Party had worked for Barbadian independence as early as the 1940s, and Grantley Adams's socialist platform gained popularity in the 1930s, galvanizing a national consciousness that eventually led to independence under Barrow's leadership.⁹⁵ Barbados was not asking for independence. Barrow insisted the island had been independent for some time, or at the very least had dutifully carried out the responsibilities of an independent if not sovereign nation (democratic process, economic survival, international trade, cultural and social reproduction). Still, independence was a little more than a sociopolitical formality. Britain's dearest child had grown up and now it was time to be more, to be a nation among nations. Independence allowed Barbados to pursue its own economic goals, and as evidenced in joining the UN only a month after formal independence, it allowed the nation to define itself internationally. Barbados had been prized more than any other British colony. In the 1960s, with the rapid decline of the British empire, and the subsequent rise of independent nation-states, it was time for the nation to move. In the first minutes of the first hour on the 30th of November 1966 Barbados made its move toward freedom.

In the 1968 *Barbados Report of the Ministry of External Affairs*, Prime Minister Errol Barrow opens with an introduction stating how the nation is entering into world affairs. He begins by explaining how Barbados had experienced a representational government for over three hundred years, and how in his opinion “at independence, there was little left to do, *in constitutional terms*, beyond lowering one flag and hoisting another.”⁹⁶ This introduction spans

⁹² Lamming, *Seasons of Adventure*, 17, 18.

⁹³ In the early 1960s Barbados was a major player in the West Indian Federation.

⁹⁴ See Appendix.

⁹⁵ See Hoyos, *Grantley Adams* and Hoyos, *Builders of Barbados*.

⁹⁶ Barbados Report of the Ministry of External Affairs For the Year 1968. Barbados Government Printing Office. emphasis mine.

Barrow's first two years in office after independence. It lays out his wishes for the nation, and the terms that he uses ("Barbados has emerged," "Barbados has perceived," "Barbados's first sovereign decision," etc.) suggest that he, as prime minister, is expressing a unified national consciousness.⁹⁷ He lays out the improbability of such a small nation making a big splash on the world stage, but nevertheless promises that Barbados will do its best to move itself and the world toward peace and prosperity.

One of the ways in which Barrow meant to do this was through his dedication to regionalism. Barbados had been a major player in the Federation of the West Indies from 1958 until the Federation's collapse in 1962. Barrow, long before the prospect of becoming Prime Minister, had always been driven by a dream of Caribbean unity. In 1962 he spoke to the conditions that such unity would be based on: "We are, therefore, bound together by some ties of consanguinity, it is true, but we are bound together by similar conditions and similar economic background more than anything else."⁹⁸ Barrow acknowledged that the majority of the region's population had a common past in Africa, and that the movement of people through the Caribbean had created blood ties between the islands. But in looking specifically at Barbados, he recognized that his homeland was culturally closer to its western colonizer than its African heritage. He posited ancestry as important, but the common condition of colonialism was what really bound the region together, and moving past that condition would be the way in which the region as a whole would come to define its future.

The high social expectations surrounding Barbadian independence are evident in the national symbols, and present a beautiful ideal.⁹⁹ The national flag features a broken trident representing the break with the British and its monarchy. The presence of the trident reveals the history of the relation to Britain, and its centrality belies how central the history of "Little England" has been to Barbadian identity. Yet, the trident is broken and surrounded by the bright cerulean blue and golden yellow that stand for the sky, sand, and sea, Barbados's most abundant natural resources. The national motto "Pride and Industry" relies on the reputation that Barbadians had earned throughout the Caribbean and in other sites of migration. Known to be extremely hard-working, dignified and proud almost to the point of haughtiness, Barbadians distinguished themselves within the sentiments of pride and industry. The last lines of Barbados's Pledge of Allegiance, "...to do credit to my nation wherever I may go," posit the ideal that one would always be Barbadian while acknowledging that migration and movement are a constitutive part of the national identity. The national anthem gives the most salient representation for the wishes of an independent Barbadian nation-state. The declaration that "these fields and hills are now our own" and "upward and onward we shall go, inspiring, exalting, free" give voice to the "natural freedom of movement" Lamming's character Powell speaks of. Living up to the expectations these symbols portray would prove much harder than constructing them.

In achieving independence, Barbados (and much of the West Indies) was still dependent on liberal political ideology, the same gendered ideology prevalent after Emancipation. Liberal ideology confined women to the domestic sphere while men operated in public spaces. Writing in 1998, Eudine Barriteau suggests that "we should deconstruct the foundational assumptions of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Barrow, "Federation and the Democratic way of life" statement to Parliament on 20 June 1962 in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 50.

⁹⁹ See Appendix

liberal political ideology to reveal its gendered construction of citizenship.”¹⁰⁰ Such a deconstruction would have proven difficult in the decades after independence since throughout the West Indies “discussions on gender were women’s business. Discussions about race and class were everybody’s business.”¹⁰¹ In the decades preceding independence men had fathered the idea of a Barbadian nation-state because, according to the liberal ideology such discourses were the domain of men. Even after independence “the political leaders, formally educated or not, were male. The mantle of political leadership passed from white males to black males.”¹⁰² In the move toward freedom this was one arena where, as Lamming’s character Powell might say, “you might as well call your dog a cat an’ hope to hear him meow”; little had changed.¹⁰³

Independence, for Barbados, was predicated on inevitable change, and the young nation-state entered onto the world stage with the best of intentions, but on the island the economic and, to some degree, social structures still mirrored that of the colonial past. According to David Theo Goldberg “the state inherently is the institutionalization of homogeneity.”¹⁰⁴ If we accept this premise, it is easy to see how many of the varied communities and identities that had coexisted on the island of Barbados became subsumed in the politics of the new nation-state. The state’s need to create a national ideal based on the black masses overlooked many of the nation’s minorities, because as Goldberg notes “the state is a contestant in the markets of representation, of who speaks for whom and in and on what terms.”¹⁰⁵ While at least ninety percent of Barbados’s population was of African descent, the nation has still maintained a degree of diversity. Minority groups such as poor whites, a middle-eastern merchant class, and a growing immigrant community have brought the racial and religious diversity of neighboring islands to Barbados’s shores.¹⁰⁶ These people by and large were not included in representations of the young nation-state. And more so than ever the power of minority groups such as the elite white class was a source of social disdain for a largely black nation seeking to rule itself in a time of black nationalism. The “natural freedom” the masses were moving toward was in conflict with the lack of sociopolitical change independence had brought to the island.

The group most dangerous to this new independence, however, would be the growing black and brown middle class intelligentsia.¹⁰⁷ Their understandings of Barbadian society far outdid those of the colonial powers or white elite. Their climb up the social ladder had been a treacherous and earnest one that only grew in intensity in the decades before independence, and as black and brown people they racially fit the ideal of the new nation. Yet, the attitudes which led them to their tenuous social position were rooted in a colonial past. As Lamming’s *Seasons of Adventure* character Powell explains

They harsh an’ cruel ‘cause they think that freedom is a gift they can’t afford to lose. Is bad that thinkin’, is the nearest any man come to killin’ what he is. Take it from me, Crim, you can take it from me. If I ever give you freedom, Crim, then all your future is

¹⁰⁰ Barriteau, “Liberal Ideology and Contradictions,” 441.

¹⁰¹ Collins, “Sometimes You have to Drink Vinegar,” 387.

¹⁰² Ibid., 386. Female politicians began coming to power in the Caribbean decades later.

¹⁰³ Lamming, *Seasons of Adventure*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 109.

¹⁰⁶ See www.ncf.bb

¹⁰⁷ See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* for a more detailed account of class and decolonization.

mine, 'cause whatever you do in freedom name is what I make happen. Seein' that way is a blindness from the start.'¹⁰⁸

Independence is not synonymous with freedom. Independence is a political act that presents new psychological, economic, and cultural challenges.¹⁰⁹ In order for Barbados to honestly confront those challenges one would have to work with, through, or around the middle class intelligentsia.

While Prime Minister Barrow was consistently radical on international issues such as imperialism, African independence movements, and apartheid, he was not outwardly against the “economic stranglehold that the white elite held over the country.”¹¹⁰ Barrow had made his political career speaking as a man of the people, and now as Prime Minister he would still have to demonstrate his commitment to the working classes. Historian Hilary Beckles explains that because Barrow was “unable to implement structural changes in the ownership of productive resources and the social organization of the plantation-based formation, Barrow resorted to radical social policies that carried the potential for long-term transformations.”¹¹¹ These policies included free secondary and tertiary education, national insurance, incentives to small black businesses, and a cohesive national health policy. While the largely silent elite continued to enjoy their privileged position, the nation-state focused on appeasing the middle and working classes.

The working class and the middle class had different socioeconomic goals and different sets of expectations that the new nation-state would have to marry in order to appease both sectors of society. Such a task was aided by the fact that Prime Minister Barrow had no intentions of restructuring the socioeconomic landscape of the new nation-state. He believed that governments had the responsibility to improve the conditions of the poor, materially and socially, but he was not inclined to give them direct power.¹¹² As a self-proclaimed “penniless politician” who wished just as much for the children of his servants as for his own, Barrow created the illusion of upliftment in his own moral expressions.¹¹³ In reality, Barrow was a man of the people, but he was also a part of the landlord class, and such a position ultimately shaped the way in which he viewed social power. The working classes had specific social and economic needs and they had engaged in the rhetoric surrounding independence that promised to put control of the nation’s destiny in the hands of the people. Yet the middle class, educated in both colonial and local structures, were prepared and expected to take the reins of leadership. As Lamming reflects in a 1995 essay, “Education had made this class a serious obstacle to development, and a hostile enemy against any struggle for cultural authenticity, for the compiling of the native territory.”¹¹⁴ The social need to create and maintain an independent national identity was threatened by the middle class’s ties to the colonial ideologies in which they had been educated and through which they had gained their social status.

¹⁰⁸ Lamming, *Seasons of Adventure*, 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, “The Challenge of Independence.”

¹¹⁰ Beckles, “Radicalism and Errol Barrow,” 229.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 228.

¹¹³ Barrow, “This is the parting of the ways” speech in Parliament 4 Jan 1966 introducing resolution for Brit to convene Bim mind. conference in Haniff, *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, 73.

¹¹⁴ Lamming, *Coming, Coming Home*, 17.

Although, as Barrow notes, Barbados had always enjoyed a representative government and in the early 1960s full internal self-government, the island was still protected by the legacy if not the diplomacy of a British Empire. As political scientist Gordon Lewis notes,

West Indians have been made to feel, frequently to their own satisfaction, that with paramount responsibility resting with London, Britain would always look after things, would always guarantee their safety... There was lacking the one single incentive, the knowledge that they were on their own in an uncertain and frequently hostile world, calculated to nurture that capacity. That incentive is now there. The real problem of independence is whether the West Indian society can respond creatively to that challenge or will react negatively, seeking in typical colonial fashion to find alibis for inaction or even deliberate evasion of responsibility.¹¹⁵

Independence meant that Barbados was entering into an entirely new set of circumstances. Addressing the UN, Barrow laid out the position of the nation, carefully noting the other players and wisely acknowledging their economic and military might. In entering into the UN, Barrow suggests that Barbados skeptically sought the support and structure of one of few international organizations with the potential to change the conditions of humanity. Quoting himself he ends with the lines “we will be friends for all, and satellites of none,” an idyllic but perhaps overzealous declaration.

As Gordon Lewis notes, with political independence “a new sense of personal responsibility, of personal involvement, must grow up, for much of what passes for a new national spirit is frequently a sterile anti-colonial prejudice.”¹¹⁶ He goes on to say that “it is not enough, with independence, to be merely against something, however justifiably. One must be for something.”¹¹⁷ An independent Barbadian national identity would have to be more than an anti-colonial stance.¹¹⁸ Within this new nationalism, in order to fulfill the nation’s motto of pride and industry, it was necessary to find an arena that the collective nation could find pride in and build an industry around—to find something to be for. The cultural arena satisfied this need.¹¹⁹

Benedict Anderson notes the dangers and merits of nationalism and its relation to culture when he writes

In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals ... to insist on the near pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism—poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts—show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Lewis, “The Challenge of Independence,” 512.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Indeed such a stance would be nearly impossible since even after independence the Queen of England remained the symbolic head of state in Barbados. Barbados was England’s child who had grown up, but presumably could always come back home.

¹¹⁹ See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 44-45.

¹²⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 141.

Culture, as an expression of the people, becomes the rallying point for nationalism. The love of nation translates into cultural practices whereby “the search for a new national interest, it becomes obvious, is the search for a new cultural identity,” which would necessitate the growth of a new cultural nationalism.¹²¹ This cultural nationalism would have to rebuild Barbados’s cultural identity.

As a colony Barbados had been “Little England.” As an independent nation-state, basing the cultural identity on the island’s history as “Little England” seemed antithetical to independence. To remain culturally in the shadow of Great Britain would be to face in the wrong direction on the path toward freedom. After political independence, in order to make the next step “the overpowering cultural image of Britain, reinforced by the West Indian mimetic process, and which permeates nearly every nook and cranny of West Indian social psychology, must give way to new concepts of national and even personal identity rooted in West Indian experience itself.”¹²² Without such a transformation the new nation-state would find itself in a condition of cultural schizophrenia. In the late 1960s Barbados would have to assert its own cultural identity in the midst of its British past and the growing North American influence. Many West Indians understood that independence required more than national symbols, but a change in the ways in which they imagined themselves, and that that change was a matter of psychological survival.¹²³

For a newly independent Barbados such psychological survival would be coupled with economic survival. Rebuilding the cultural image of the new nation would also need be an economically viable pursuit. As an island with few natural resources, the tourism industry coupled the pursuits of economic survival and the building of a new national identity around Barbadian culture in the decades after independence.

As the economy moved away from a monocrop agricultural model and more substantially toward tourism and more service-oriented industry in the late 1950s and early 1960s, representing Barbados in the most favorable light became very important. It was not a nation that tourists were being presented with, but an island. Beaches, the then few but inviting golf courses, and high class yet quaint hotels overshadowed the images of people who served as servants and accessories to a tourist experience in advertisements. The market colored the character of the nation, so much so that in his 1964 version of *The Barbados Book* Barbadian politician and former mayor of Bridgetown Louis Lynch reports that “Barbadians are urbane and most hospitable to visitors to the island... They seem to look upon it as part of their duty, to whatever social stratum they may happen to belong, to be as kind and welcoming as possible in their attitude to visitors.”¹²⁴ In preceding decades Barbados’s regionalism had been based on the economic and political goals of the nation and its neighbors. Now more than before that regionalism became a blanket representation in the way that Mimi Sheller describes when she writes “in an endless simulacrum, earlier literary and visual representations of the ‘Paradise Isles’ have been mapped into the collective tourist unconscious before they have ever set foot there. The real Caribbean is always a performance of the vivid Caribbean of the imagination.”¹²⁵ Barbados was a part of the imagined Caribbean that already existed in the minds of its visitors, and would take great pains to live up to that imagined image. In order to set itself apart in a

¹²¹ Lewis, “The Challenge of Independence,” 513.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Lynch, *The Barbados Book*, 77.

¹²⁵ Sheller, *Tourism Mobilities*, 13.

growing market, in order to “brand” itself, Barbados would have to present something unique, and the specifics of an imagined Barbados lie in its history as “Little England,” with a safe, respectable, and inviting population.

The representation of Barbados as unique, complete with its history as “Little England,” presented a challenge to the creation of a new cultural nationalism. But there was little else to grasp onto since, as Gordon Lewis notes of the West Indies as a whole, “there is little left of the original culture in which to take pride, save for a few scattered artifacts.”¹²⁶ One alternative to the “Little England” of old was the acknowledgement of most of the population’s African heritage. A reclamation of African origins suited the black nationalism of the time period, but such nationalism was not necessarily attractive to all Barbadians or to the largely European and North American tourists who, as part of a leisured class, enjoyed the benefits of capitalism that many facets of black nationalism critiqued. Such a leisured class came to the shores of Barbados looking for an idyllic tropical image complete with a welcoming population. But as Sheller notes “the ‘untouched’ Caribbean of tourist fantasy must be held in place behind walls, gates, and service smiles in order to afford the tourist the experience of getting close to it.”¹²⁷ How could Barbadians hold in place the fantasy that would come to fuel their economy while asserting a new cultural nationalism that proudly marked a difference from the stereotype of happy subservience informed by the not so distant colonial past? Such a task was not necessarily impossible, but executing it would require calling upon the cultural complexity that had always existed on the island. Barbadians have a sociopolitical history that Beckles calls “respectable radicalism.”¹²⁸ Beckles suggests that Barbadian politicians such as Samuel Prescod, Charles Duncan O’Neale, and Conrad Reeves all pushed for radical (not revolutionary) change within the strict political confines of respectability; the idea being to bring timely change through non-threatening means. This strategy would have to translate into the cultural arena if the new independent national identity (and economy) were to survive.

¹²⁶ Lewis, “The Challenge of Independence,” 513.

¹²⁷ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 30.

¹²⁸ Beckles, “Radicalism and Errol Barrow,” 224.

Chapter Two

Tuk a Drum Beat Across the World: Performing Barbadian Personality On and Off the Rock

Let's all sing a song of praise to Bim
 Song of praise to Bim
 Song of praise to Bim
 Let's all sing a song of praise to Bim
 On independence day

Barbados land of sun
 Barbados land of sea
 Barbados means the world to me¹²⁹

A military drumbeat welcomes a flute melody setting the stage for The Merryman's "God Bless Bim." Seafaring military sounds mingle with the echoes of centuries of peoples mixed in tragedy and rebuilt in resistance as the rhythm breaks into something that is distinctly Caribbean. A solitary voice enters before a chorus joins in singing "God bless Bim on independence day/ independence day/ independence day/ God bless Bim on independence day/ God bless Bim we hope and pray." Rooted in a cultural tradition that asks for religious blessing and using the vernacular name for Barbados, The Merryman perform their love for the island nation they call home with a musical offering. The discipline of the first solitary rhythm abruptly gives way to a more exultant arrangement. The formal opening of the song introduces the more celebratory sound of a nation's independence, one whose certainty is dismissed with a hope and a prayer. Rhythms, histories, melodies, and voices all coalesce into something that is both a response and a creation: tuk.

Shored on the coasts of the easternmost Caribbean island, tuk reverberates in the rhythmic sway of the bodies that remember and recreate traditions passed through generations; and in the sound of feet marching softly, turning sharply through a history of polyrhythmic movements, simple and complex. Tuk is one of few of Barbados's acknowledged indigenous traditions. It has a home on "de Rock." Like the waves of the Atlantic Ocean meeting the Caribbean Sea, the moving sound is regular and unpredictable as it meets the land laying the soundtrack to a history both celebrated and denied. The music, its associated practices, its history, and its celebration are representative of the amalgamated complexities of Barbadian culture.

Tuk has deep roots, but is most associated with the Landship, a friendly society or "susu" in Barbados. Susus are informal mutual aid societies formed in the Eastern Caribbean, which provide a sense of collective economics to the islands' poorer classes. As performed by the Landship, tuk rhythms follow the warm up and running of a ship engine, combining the discipline of the military sound with the spirituality of its African influences especially when the

¹²⁹ The Merryman, "God Bless Bim," *The Merryman Story Live!*

movement and the rhythm align into an almost trance-like state.¹³⁰ It is both a musical phenomenon and an underlying rhythm of all things Barbadian: labor, industry, spirituality, modernity, culture, and tradition. Like the rays of sunshine that color the center of its flag, Barbados's cultural history spreads much further than the 166 square miles of its physical borders. Barbadian identity collects the sounds of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, blends them into its own sonic force and echoes back throughout the world in the bodies, expressions, attitudes, and affiliations of its people.

These echoes resound in Barbadian migration patterns and performance traditions as Barbadians across the world represent their nation proudly; but Barbados has yet to completely articulate one identifiably Barbadian national identity. Especially post-independence, European influences fight with African influences for primacy within a marketable image of an independent Barbados. Migration has exported Barbadians and Barbadian culture across the world, but the communications, remittances, material and cultural gifts that migrants return home with also disrupt any binary European/African imaginary. Performers such as The Merrymen embody the complexity of what it means to be Barbadian. Emerging as white performers during an independence movement that relied upon black nationalism, The Merrymen demonstrate what I call "national sincerity." As definitions of Barbadian identity shifted around independence, any test of authenticity became moot. Sincerity, however, allows for and relies upon a continual performance of allegiance. Groups like the Merrymen demonstrate this sense of national sincerity. Their adherence to Barbadian calypso, their use of tuk aesthetics, and their performance and innovation within Barbadian folk culture align them with a distinctly Barbadian identity: "Barbadian personality." They are undeniably Barbadian despite the fact that they were born and raised as white subjects of a British colony.

Using tuk as an underlying theme, this chapter seeks to map the diasporic, racial, and gendered performances of an independent Barbadian national culture. As an indigenous Barbadian cultural form, tuk inextricably links old histories with new innovations; European influences, African retentions, and Caribbean creations; and notions of modernity with the nostalgia of tradition. Tuk is the musical soundtrack of "Barbadian personality." I argue that post-independence, "Barbadian personality" continued to be articulated as an English colonial tradition meeting reclaimed African retentions, but it has developed along regional traditions of migration and return that spanned much farther than the sites of these influences showing the limitations of a European/African model, and ultimately Barbadians express this "personality" through performances of national sincerity.

RHYTHMS OF HISTORY

Tuk bands have their origins on the plantations of Barbados. At the end of the crop season, workers would feast and celebrate to the sounds of fife and kettle drum groups accompanied by local singers, and masquerade bands including various dancers and characters. Such celebrations came to be known as the Crop Over festival.¹³¹ The festival began with a parade of donkey carts, each decorated with hibiscus, bougainvillea, oleander, and bright cloth. The first cart was led by a woman in all white and the whole procession would parade around

¹³⁰ This is not far from the mounting or spirit possession of Vodoun, Santeria, Shango, etc. throughout the Caribbean. See Best, *Barbadian Popular Music*, 11.

¹³¹ Foster, *Island Wings*, 44.



Figure 2.1 a Crop Over donkey cart



Figure 2.2 Mother Sally

Figure 2.3 A fife and kettle drum band



two or three times so that everyone had the chance to see each cart. At one point in time an effigy of “Mr. Harding” was used to symbolize the cruelty of overseers. Common dancers and characters included stilt walkers, Donkeyman (who wore a donkey suit), Shaggy Bear (outfitted in plaintain leaves to accent the animated movements of his dance), and Mother Sally who wore an exaggerated bust and buxom to exaggerate her movements which were located mainly in the hips.¹³² The fife and kettle drum groups created a distinct sound that melded the military melodies of British sailors with the rhythms of West Africa. According to cultural scholar Curwen Best, “it is the African-derived sense of performance, with its supposed accent or emphasis on rhythms, which is responsible and accounts for the ideophonic name given to this phenomenon: *tuk*.”¹³³ Other interpretations define the term as a derivation from the Scottish word *touk*, meaning to beat a drum.¹³⁴ Both the sounds and the differing histories of the music sit squarely between African and European traditions adapted in and innovated within a Caribbean context. *Tuk* laid the foundation for Barbados’s distinct tradition of calypso, and other musical forms on the island such as spouge, and Barbadian soca.

Throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century cultural practices such as *tuk* and Crop Over still occurred but their reliance on African retentions and Caribbean innovations conflicted with the colonial image of Barbados as “Little England.” Emancipation changed the place of these cultural practices within Barbadian society. As a part of slave culture, colonialists could dismiss pre-Emancipation Crop Over as they did the humanity and “civility” of the enslaved; but with freedom former slave-owners were forced to recognize the formerly enslaved as British colonial *subjects* and cultural practices such as Crop Over became a part of the Barbadian cultural landscape. British imperialists were not fond of these cultural practices, but it was the “internal colonialists” who were most vehemently against them.¹³⁵

The scarcity of resources during the war years in the 1940s all but abolished the early Crop Over festival, which required a number of material elements. Like many folk traditions, *tuk* went “underground” during this period. The musical instruments could be improvised from cheaper materials, but there were fewer outlets for performance. *Tuk* bands survived in the rural areas of the island, “mainly in the hilly Scotland District parishes of St. Andrew, St. Joseph, St. Peter and St. Thomas.”¹³⁶ Authors of the compilation *Folk Music of Barbados* acknowledge that “this may be a disputable point, but that is where we were told to search for them, and that is where we found them.”¹³⁷ The bands became associated with holidays and traveling musicians, and were often looked down upon by the middle-class. In a society that prided itself on the industriousness of its people, traveling musicians had to fight the stigma of laziness and “wutlessness” in order to practice their craft.¹³⁸ Many in the upper-classes and those with

¹³² “25 Years of Crop Over” NCF archives. The Mother Sally character was traditionally performed by men, but as the tradition continued women increasingly played Mother Sally and still wore the exaggerated elements of the costume.

¹³³ Best, *Barbadian Popular Music*, 10. Curwen Best identifies the rhythms and performance traditions as Igbo.

¹³⁴ Meredith, “Barbadian *tuk* music,” 81.

¹³⁵ Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 20. Internal colonialist/colonialism refers to the power structures of the island including legislature, the Anglican church, and the planter class.

¹³⁶ Marshall et. al, *Folk Songs of Barbados*, xiv. See Appendix: Barbados Political Map.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*.

¹³⁸ “Wutlessness” is a vernacular form of worthlessness, having no use in society, the inherent quality of being unproductive.

middle-class aspirations saw these musicians (who more often than not survived on the charity of their door to door audience) as musical beggars, or even worse in their eyes, as dangerously similar to “Africans.” It was not until the nation began to assert itself socially, politically, and culturally in the 1960s, that indigenous forms such as tuk began to receive their due, and even since then it has been a long fought fight. In 1962, after more than one hundred years of existence, a tuk band performed on a formal stage for the first time at the Civic theatre.¹³⁹

While tuk went “underground” in the 1940s, Trinidadian calypso began making inroads on the Barbadian landscape along with European folk songs, hymns and ballads, North American cowboy songs, Black American spirituals and minstrels. Older calypsonians remember listening to European classical music such as Brahms along with black American singers such as Ella Fitzgerald when radio first reached the island in the 1950s.¹⁴⁰ Barbadian audiences viewed these other musical styles as “serious” music, while Barbadian calypsonians and tuk bands were seen as comic relief. A few brave Barbadian calypsonians such as DaCosta Allamby, Frank Taylor and the Mighty Charmer vied against Trinidadian calypsonians for the attention of Barbadian audiences, and struggled to be recognized as legitimate artists. Without Crop Over celebrations and with these other styles dominating other outlets, in the 1940s and 1950s few forums existed for Barbadian calypsonians to practice their trade. From 1958-1964 there was a small Trinidadian style carnival held at Kensington Oval.¹⁴¹ This Carnival was sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Its popularity didn’t hold well as it was organized by and for a small white elite audience.¹⁴² The Yoruba Foundation, a pan-Africanist organization founded by Elombe Mottley also attempted to revive Crop Over, but many potential patrons were put off by the organization’s overt association with Africa and African cultures.¹⁴³ Barbadian calypso struggled to find a foothold on the island, and the efforts at providing space for it in the cultural landscape failed because they were rooted too strongly either in a white upperclass audience or in an overtly “African” organization.

Many frustrated with the limited opportunities for Barbadian calypsonians and still seeking to carve out a niche within the world of music turned to *spouge*. Created by Jackie Opel, *spouge* is another genre indigenous to Barbados. Opel was born in Barbados, but made his name as a ska singer in Jamaica, working with the famed Skatalites and purportedly using Bob Marley and Peter Tosh as back-up musicians.¹⁴⁴ As Opel’s fame rose throughout the 1960s he began to tour throughout the Caribbean and the U.K. eventually returning home to Barbados and creating a new sound. This sound epitomizes Caribbean innovation.

Spouge, like tuk, is an indigenous Barbadian form that relies on innovation and borrowing, and reflects the ways in which Barbadian indigeneity is a unique mosaic of the island’s cultural influences. Similar to Jamaican ska in that it draws on various other forms but maintains a recognizable rhythm, instrumentation, and sound, *spouge* outsold reggae at one point and then all but left the musical landscape after Jackie Opel’s sudden death in a car crash in 1970. *Spouge* features a syncopated drum pattern, consistent guitar, cow bell, and a “lazy” bass, all creating a distinctive rhythmic sound. The *spouge* rhythm is often (but not always) used beneath covers of American soul music and Jamaican reggae. Both tuk and *spouge* are

¹³⁹ Stafford, “Brown and Black Middle Class.”

¹⁴⁰ Carter, interview.

¹⁴¹ “25 Years of Crop Over” NCF archives. Kensington Oval is a cricket arena also used for large performances.

¹⁴² Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 29-30.

¹⁴³ Harewood, “Policy and Performance,” 213.

¹⁴⁴ Watson, “Cultural Heritage,” 11.

indigenous traditions that faced strong competition with other genres invading the island in the mid-twentieth century.

At the time of spouge's creation Barbados had rich cultural forms and practices, but very few indigenous cultural institutions to support them. The Merry-men seemed to be the only Barbadian calypsonians with consistent success. Many were frustrated with the lack of opportunities for calypso and turned to spouge. According to cultural scholar Curwen Best, spouge was short-lived because it had no ideological base. It was a part of the independence moment, which since it changed very little, was largely symbolic.¹⁴⁵

Barbados enjoyed more internal governance than any other colony within the British commonwealth. Independence in 1966 marked the beginnings of an ideological shift in imagining the nation, more than a shift in governance. It also created the possibilities for national redefinition, giving the newly independent nation the space to redefine itself on the global stage as something other than a British colony. In the decades after independence Barbadian culture began to mirror these efforts as more and more artists represented the independent nation regionally and globally. By the 1980s Barbadian calypsonians were making their mark throughout the region and the musical child of calypso – soca – drew larger and larger audiences as well.¹⁴⁶ While these genres and their performances draw heavily from foreign influences, their Barbadian iterations have strong roots in tuk traditions and tuk sounds.

In the twenty-first century, tuk can be found mixed into the soca rhythms of contemporary musicians and more overtly in celebrations of the Landship society and in the lobbies of expensive hotels.¹⁴⁷ Contemporary tuk bands include a bass drum, snare or kettle drum, penny whistle or flute, and a percussive instrument, usually the triangle.¹⁴⁸ Like steel bands, they have come to accommodate a number of genres and perform European classics, Negro spirituals, popular Billboard tracks, and a wide range of indigenous Caribbean music.¹⁴⁹ Since the 1974 rebirth of Crop Over as a government-sponsored celebration “there has been a growing acceptance of the tuk band by the establishment. But there has not been an understanding of its socio-historical and cultural purpose as an indigenous entity.”¹⁵⁰ As an indigenous cultural form tuk has more cultural currency now that the island's economy is focused on (high end) tourism.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of migration and return, and the role that these processes have played both in forming and performing a national identity. This discussion is explored further in a look at Barbadian musical performance traditions with a focus on Barbadian calypso. I highlight their various roots on the island and elsewhere arguing that the complexities of forming and maintaining Barbadian national identity are manifested in Barbadian performance. Barbadians form, perform, police, and challenge an ideal national identity through representation. The chapter ends by examining the details of race, gender, and respectability within musical representations of Barbadian identity.

¹⁴⁵ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 232.

¹⁴⁶ Soca began as a faster paced version of calypso, but is now recognized as a separate though related genre with many subgenres of its own.

¹⁴⁷ Wayne “Poonka” Willock is a calypsonian and tuk band leader who has been instrumental in keeping the form alive by teaching it in Barbadian schools and performing during Bridgetown Market, the main market of the Crop Over Festival. See Meredith “Barbadian *tuk* music.”

¹⁴⁸ Best, *Barbadian Popular Music*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 54.

MIGRATIONS: REPRESENTING BIM

. . . because the origin of the Caribbean started with the Diaspora; it's nothing new.¹⁵¹

In most respects there is no typical West Indian or Barbadian migrant story.¹⁵²

Migration is integral to the history of the Caribbean region. As one of the most densely populated islands in the world, for Barbados in particular, emigration was one way to alleviate social strains created by “overpopulation.”¹⁵³ After Emancipation in 1838, the planter classes feared that the island’s labor force would migrate away, but once levels of poverty started to rise on the island they began to gently encourage the poorer classes to migrate away permanently. In 1889, government formed a commission to investigate migration as a possible remedy to the perceived population crisis. Such efforts allowed the upper classes to hold onto the idea of a surplus labor force, and control wages on the island accordingly. The idea of surplus labor kept workers complacent with the knowledge that someone else would be ready and willing to step into their positions. The reality of underemployment was not nearly as potent or effective as the idea of it. In this way the largely white merchant and planter classes sought to control the means of production and the elements that determined the opportunities available to the larger labor force.¹⁵⁴

Migration, however, did not necessarily happen in the ways in which the planter class wished. Ideally poor families would migrate permanently, but “the difficulty for the Barbados Government was not that Barbadians were reluctant to migrate, but that the wrong people migrated, for the wrong reasons, for the wrong period of time.”¹⁵⁵ Most emigrants left the island with short-term plans of finding economic stability and returning home with enough wealth to sustain themselves and their families.¹⁵⁶ One major example of this is the building of the Panama Canal at the turn of the twentieth century. Barbadians comprised a large segment of the island folk who left family behind in order to do the heavy lifting of the canal’s construction. These laborers returned to Barbados with “Panama money,” which boosted the local economy and made some impact on social status, class positioning, and local politics thus threatening the upper class hold on these arenas in ways they did not anticipate when they initially promoted emigration.¹⁵⁷

The largely African-descended working masses found and produced their own employment opportunities. While the upper classes attempted to use migration as a means of control, migration allowed the working classes to negotiate and expand their employment opportunities on and off of the island. Mary Chamberlain explains: “Consistent unemployment and underemployment – which had been a feature of the Barbadian economy since Emancipation – encouraged a pattern of employment which was flexible and variable, as workers moved

¹⁵¹ Kamau Brathwaite quoted in Burrowes, “Golokwati Conversations,” 12.

¹⁵² Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 26-27.

between seasonal or temporary work, between waged and self-employed labour, all of which could include migration as a part of an occupational strategy.”¹⁵⁸ Such strategies for control and self-determination happened in a period of burgeoning nationalism. Only years after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, Garveyism and labor organizing swept the region and was most visible in the 1937 actions that have been characterized by some as labor “riots.”¹⁵⁹ Migration allowed for wider economic, social, and political networks of opportunity. Many of the earliest political organizations within Barbados sprung from organized labor, and their power and social clout can be traced to their economic successes abroad and the social networks built through migration.¹⁶⁰

Barbadian migration takes on different characteristics in the 1960s independence era. In the 1940s war period and throughout the 1950s, the U.K. was the major site for Barbadian migrants due to the cultural and political ties as well as economic initiatives that provided employment opportunities to West Indian migrants. In the 1960s, migration paths to the U.K. began to swing toward the U.S. after the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act placed restrictions on the number of colonials entering the U.K.¹⁶¹ New York in particular saw a surge of West Indian immigrants in 1965 that lasted well throughout the 1980s.¹⁶² West Indian communities began to form outside of Harlem producing their own publications, businesses, and private education under an ethnic banner of West Indianness that separated them from black Americans, but subsumed (to some extent) national differences.¹⁶³ Part of this new West Indianness formed from a common experience of living within the context of a black majority creating a majority consciousness, coupled with class aspirations, and educational attainment.¹⁶⁴

Even within this new “West Indian” population “where West Indians from different islands live side by side, Barbadians [were] commonly thought of as being ‘smug,’ ‘prideful,’ and ‘know-it-all.’”¹⁶⁵ Barbadian author, musician, and former cultural officer Antonio ‘boo’ Rudder suggests that such characterizations stem from an empty performance of pride. In his assertion, Barbadians are proud of their identity, but don’t really own it, and when they display a pride without knowing exactly what they are proud of, it often translates as “arrogance rather than self-assurance.”¹⁶⁶ Other stereotypes emerged. Black Americans used terms such as black Jews, middlemen, and ghetto entrepreneurs to describe West Indians in general. Such terms marked West Indians as foreigners within New York’s black communities, positioning them precariously as potential exploiters and/or as potential economic models.

Throughout most of the twentieth century the gendered structure of Barbadian society informed Barbadian migration patterns and how migrants structured their own narratives.

¹⁵⁸ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 84.

¹⁵⁹ See chapter one, page 17, and Hoyos, *Barbados: A History*. On July 26, 1937 workers gathered in the capital city of Bridgetown to protest the deportation of Clement Payne a Trinidadian labor organizer born to Barbadian parents. Payne had been instrumental in union organizing and in voicing the concerns of the workers. The protesters met the hostility of authorities in a violent clash that left many storefronts of the business district damaged. Similar events occurred throughout the Eastern Caribbean that year.

¹⁶⁰ A prime example would be the relationship between the Democratic League (the nation’s first political party founded in 1924) and the Working Man’s Association. See Worrel, *Pan-Africanism in Barbados*.

¹⁶¹ Waters, *Black Identities*, 22.

¹⁶² Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 54.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 55-79.

¹⁶⁴ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*. 258.

¹⁶⁵ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Rudder, *Different Drummer*, 8-9.

Within North American migration, the women outnumbered men and worked mainly in domestic labor, as opposed to migration to Britain, in which men moved in higher numbers than their female counterparts. When the need for domestics diminished, the gender ratio of migrants began to even out.¹⁶⁷ Both the statistics and migrants' narratives reflect the circumstances surrounding gendered migration. In her account of how Barbadian migrants remember and narrate their experiences, Chamberlain finds that the men in her study were more likely to narrate their migrations as individuals, and rarely began their stories by speaking of the families or communities they had to leave behind. The women in the study, however, were more likely to narrate their experiences as part of a familial responsibility to earn a better income abroad. She found that the women were "not truly autonomous agents. Neither [were] the men. But whereas the men present themselves autonomously, the women present themselves within a set of family relationships, as part of a larger picture and process."¹⁶⁸ The men spoke of their decision making process as individuals, some with whimsical spontaneous desires to try something new, whereas the women narrated their decisions as part of larger familial and social contexts. While the results were largely the same, men expressed autonomy through migration, while women achieved autonomy through migration.

Those who ventured abroad as children inherited a complicated sense of West Indian identity. Their struggles to place themselves included diasporic sensibilities. Their "roots" lay in their personal histories, their parents, and all they knew about life on "de Rock," but they also related to (in varying degrees) black America, and other West Indian immigrants. Often these "West Indians [found] themselves caught between powerful cross-pressures of ethnic separatism and racial identification."¹⁶⁹ For these populations, concepts of the local and the global long stopped being a geographical construct. Barbadian-born psychiatrist and professor Ezra E. H. Griffith explains in talking about his father: "When I talk about him and the West Indian island of Barbados, I am talking about me, about my persona that is grounded in the history and geography of Barbados, about me linked to a father I could never extract from that island."¹⁷⁰ Griffith's move to the U.S. as a child and subsequent life in the States has been distinctly undergirded by his relationship to his "home" expressed through his recollections of the personal relationships he formed there. Even without a desire to return, his understandings of himself are intricately linked to "that island." Mary Waters's study of Black Anglophone Caribbean immigrants in New York seeks to explain some of these identity formations. She argues that that "black immigrants from the Caribbean come to the United States with a particular identity/culture/worldview that reflects their unique history and experiences."¹⁷¹ Even in becoming (or deciding whether or not to become) a black American, immigrants and their children have a perspective on identity formation that blends their own specific island experiences with a history of interisland migration, and in the 1960s in particular, a new sense of nation-building.¹⁷²

Woven into the men's and women's narratives of Chamberlain's text is a general sentiment of "our people love to travel." Here the social, political, and economic impetuses and histories of migration and return are expressed as a part of Barbadian culture. There is a

¹⁶⁷ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 54.

¹⁶⁸ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 102.

¹⁶⁹ Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 139

¹⁷⁰ Griffith, *I'm Your Father, Boy*, 9.

¹⁷¹ Waters, *Black Identities*, 6.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 24.

collective sentiment that those on the island love to leave, for various reasons and lengths of time, but they still identify as Barbadian. In fact, “in much of the Anglophone Caribbean, migration has become a normal and expected part of the normal adult life cycle, a virtual rite of passage.”¹⁷³

For one of the stalwarts of Barbadian music, the Mighty Gabby, migration was not just a rite of passage, but an exploration which ultimately mapped the possibilities of his life course. Raised in the neighborhood of Emmerton in the parish of St. Michael, Barbados, Anthony “Gabby” Carter began his singing career as a stand in for a sick child singing in the Chapman Lane choir at a primary school singing competition when he was six years old.¹⁷⁴ He took his musical moniker from one of his most distinguishing character traits: the gift of gab. By the age of ten he wrote his first song, “Vote for Mottley and Get Free Cakee,” about then mayor of the capital city of Bridgetown, Ernest Diten Mottley, who “wielded tremendous power.”¹⁷⁵ Even at such a young age Gabby melded his curiosity and his musical ability with his own commentary of the politics and culture of his home.

As a public figure and most especially as a Barbadian artist, Gabby represents the meeting of contradictory ideals. He speaks to middle-class respectability through working class, folk aesthetics, expressed through local and diasporic forms. The culture represented in Gabby’s music and in the unwavering sentiment of pride and affiliation found in Griffith’s memoir has a host of expressions that travel and move amongst and between the many stages of Barbadian history and the networks of migration built by Barbadian people. Barbadian performance traditions begin with the same cultural influences that form the basis for the island’s cultural identity, namely the meeting of African and European traditions coupled with Caribbean innovations. The folk performances of the early slave populations worked within and around the plantation system of power and control. Like many other African diasporic traditions in the New World, Barbadian cultural expressions (especially the African elements) were masked in hegemonic acceptance. Folk language, dance, and music expressed both overt submission and more covert resistance.¹⁷⁶

Folk traditions thrive in the working classes, those with the least access to either a colonial or nationalistic ideal. Given their location within the sociocultural hierarchy, many who aspired toward the middle class had little to say for folk traditions. Even the traditions they themselves practiced were not to be taken seriously. As a child Anthony “Gabby” Carter knew he wanted to be a calypsonian, but even with his obvious talent, when he expressed his wishes to make calypso his trade his mother rebuked him:

She’d say, “There is no black singers in Barbados who make money, not one. Name one. Tell me one.” She broke up the guitar I had made. It’s true there was none, but I was determined to be the first. But now that I look back on it, I must have been mad to think I could receive any kind of support from my mother, when the best singer and composer of the time, Shillingford Agard, earned no more than a few shillings per week. He was so rich in talent, yet he died poor, slumped over in his favorite chair in his little house.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 19-20.

¹⁷⁴ Gabby. *Gabby ‘til now*. Ice Music Ltd. 1996.

¹⁷⁵ Carter, interview.

¹⁷⁶ For an example of how class and race worked within Barbadian performance see John Cowley’s analysis of descriptions of the Joe and Johnny dance, Cowley, “Music and Migration,” 62-63.

¹⁷⁷ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 184.

Growing up in colonial Barbados, singing was not a viable means of support, especially for someone like Gabby who grew up in the poor neighborhood of Emmerton. The songs (and dances) of the folk were necessary as a means of relief from the daily struggles of finding work enough to put food on the table. Even though some were laced with political satire, even though the very rhythms and movements were a political statement expressing elements of an identity that were officially denied, most Barbadians rarely saw folk traditions as valuable.

That all changed in 1962 when a group of white Barbadian men named the Merry-men brought a level of respectability to Barbadian folk music and calypso performing throughout the Caribbean, England, Canada, and the U.S. often in front of record breaking audiences. Founded by Emile Straker, Stephen Fields and Robin Hunte, the Merry-men played Barbadian and other Caribbean folk songs over a calypso rhythm that they termed “Caribbeat.”¹⁷⁸ Between the years of 1965 and 1967 (the height of independence) the Merry-men toured Canada, England, and the



Figure 2.4

¹⁷⁸ *The Merry-men Story Live!* CRS Music and Media, 2006; Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 31.

Caribbean. Much of their touring was a joint venture between the group and the Barbados Tourism Authority,¹⁷⁹ wherein each party paid fifty percent of the tour expenses. The Merry-men's popularity grew drastically while they promoted Barbados across continents. Their popularity spread at the same time that another group of white musicians was sweeping the airwaves across continents: the Beatles. Both groups worked with producer George Martin and recorded at Abbey Road Studio in London.¹⁸⁰ The success of the Merry-men gave promise to the idea that Barbadian calypso could follow on the heels of Trinidadian calypso, which had gone beyond the waters of the Caribbean with the success of artists such as the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener; or perhaps even further into the realm of something akin to Beatlemania. Back at home in Barbados, the Merry-men played to sold out audiences and young children debated over who was better, the Merry-men or the Beatles. While a number of other forms of music competed on the island, the Merry-men continued to play calypso and folk. Scholar Trevor Marshall describes the band as the most well-known and dedicated; when many others turned to funk, reggae, and spouge, the Merry-men were busy "saving" Barbadian calypso from "extinction."¹⁸¹

The Merry-men reached success when other Barbadian calypsonians struggled greatly to gain even a precarious foothold within the "established" (or well-funded) music arena. Ironically, this white group was able to do this in a time of black nationalism and independence. In his history of Barbadian calypso, Trevor Marshall explains:

The key to the success of the Merry-men as opposed to the frustrating experiences of the generality of Black calypsonians lies largely in the difference in social status and membership of a 'shade' grouping. In Barbadian society, in which European colonisation and religion had successfully instilled the notion of the superiority of the white cultural force, this factor alone would have gone a long way in assuring their acceptance by the public, and, therefore, the frequent well-paid engagements which they attracted in the period 1965-1985.¹⁸²

The Merry-men performed Caribbean folk music, much of which had previously been associated with the black masses, but it was their white skin that allowed them to bring legitimacy to those same cultural forms. Their performance is reliant on what I term "national sincerity." Taking into account the context of the moment of their success, the Merry-men's performance of Barbadian folk culture in a time of independence is also a performance of allegiance to the nation of Barbados and the Caribbean region rather than to a colonizer.

Anthropologist John L. Jackson Jr. adapts Lionel Trilling's concept of sincerity and authenticity in order to understand how academic and colloquial conversations about racial "authenticity" can be better understood through the lens of racial "sincerity."¹⁸³ Echoing Trilling, Jackson notes how "sincerity demands its performance," and "wallows in unfalsifiability, ephemerality, partiality, and social vulnerability."¹⁸⁴ Authenticity, on the other hand, privileges structure and requires hard proof often relegating the authentic to object status

¹⁷⁹ then termed the Barbados Board of Tourism

¹⁸⁰ *The Merry-men Story Live!* CRS Music and Media, 2006

¹⁸¹ Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 32.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸³ Jackson, *Real Black*; Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*.

¹⁸⁴ Jackson, *Real Black*, 14, 17.

as it is verified.¹⁸⁵ In Trilling's assertion the supposed objectivity of authenticity is what makes it valuable, and ultimately trustworthy. Jackson prefers sincerity as a means of analyzing identity, because sincerity is both performance and performative.¹⁸⁶ It exists because of its constant performance, and its performance proves its existence. While Trilling argues that one cannot trust sincerity, Jackson contends that sincerity's subjectivity is just as valid and perhaps more telling in analyzing the production and policing of identities and communities. Expanding Jackson's conversation beyond the U.S. and extending his concept beyond racial identity, I posit that the Merryman are an example of national sincerity.

The Merryman's success during a time when the Barbadian nation was forging a new cultural identity based on indigenous traditions, and distinctly Barbadian innovations (yet not wholly devoid of the still prevalent British influence), allowed them to declare and perform their national sincerity as Barbadians. Their public appearance as white men fits an easy (and false) model – whiteness equals coloniality, and thus whiteness cannot represent an independent Barbadian nation. The Merryman's musical performance proves this model false, showing the slippages of race and culture within Barbadian identity. Their popularity amongst Barbadians and non-Barbadians alike confirms that even as white men (and in some ways because of their whiteness) they can indeed exist and represent an independent Barbados; they can know, love, and produce Barbadian culture; and they can sincerely perform that culture within a new national imaginary. The song "God Bless Bim," with its reliance on *tuk*, celebration of Barbadian independence, and vernacular language, is but one performance of the Merryman's national sincerity.

In a burgeoning nation whose national identity is assumed rather than structured; where everyone knows what is *not* Barbadian and thus articulating what *is* Barbadian becomes unnecessary; where every Barbadian instinctively knows what is meant by "Barbadian personality," so much so that the structures for authenticating Barbadianness are virtually non-existent, the performance of a sincere national identity is about as close as one can come to authenticating a Barbadian personality.¹⁸⁷ The fact that the Merryman worked within folk culture proved the sincerity of their performance as Barbadians. They believed themselves to be Barbadians, to be folk singers, and to be capable of representing Barbadian culture, and performed in such a way that conveyed this belief to their audiences at home and abroad.¹⁸⁸ Simultaneously, the Merryman's racial privilege allowed them to perform indigenous Barbadian forms in larger arenas than either the post-independence ideal of a black nation or the colonial "ideal" of "Little England" would allow. Serving both the hegemonic and colonial ideology that whiteness is better, and a nationalistic ideology that privileged folk culture, The Merryman's social and racial status allowed them to perform their national sincerity on the island and spread its seeds across continents, without engaging in authenticity tests of black nationalism, British colonialism, or "Little Englandness." For over a decade after their initial appearance on stage the Merryman were the most well-known Barbadian calypsonians.

The Merryman were the most popular, but they were hardly the only ones. By the late 1960s calypso had become competitive, and in 1968, at the age of nineteen, Gabby became the

¹⁸⁵ Jackson, *Real Black*, 14-15.

¹⁸⁶ For a conversation of identity as performance and performativity see Johnson, "Quare Studies," 135-147.

¹⁸⁷ Clarke, "Roots," 302.

¹⁸⁸ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 17-18.



Figure 2.5
Elombe Mottley crowning Gabby as Calypso Monarch

island's youngest Calypso Monarch.¹⁸⁹ This was the beginning of a long list of musical and cultural achievements, but before all of the acclaim Gabby was a twenty-something-year-old musician performing on yachts for tourists earning two dollars a day.¹⁹⁰ Hearing of Canada and the U.S. he wanted to see what all the talk was about and vowed to leave the island for five years setting sail for New York in 1971. He was a young man hoping to expand his horizons before accepting his role as a fully responsible adult within Barbadian society. His wish to migrate included a desire to return and settle into adult life in Barbados while still in his twenties.

Gabby's experience of migration politicized him. He left the island with dreams of material wealth. Working within the garment district in New York he was exposed to unions in a way that he had not been in Barbados.¹⁹¹ He met with other Barbadians from different class backgrounds and eventually joined the Barbados Theater Workshop in New York. He read James Baldwin and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, studied Marcus Garvey and Harry Belafonte countering his British colonial education that had told him "that we had no history—that our history was just the slave thing and that it wasn't worth knowing."¹⁹² He returned to

¹⁸⁹ Musical competition has been central to the many forms of Crop Over throughout Barbados's history. Calypso monarchs hold the title of king (or queen) of their musical craft.

¹⁹⁰ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 184.

¹⁹¹ While labor unions existed in Barbados, they did not yet exist in the entertainment industry when Gabby migrated in the 1970s. The first registered trade union for entertainment workers was the Musician's and Entertainer's Guild of Barbados founded by Sach Moore in 1976. See Rudder, *Different Drummer*.

¹⁹² Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 189.

Barbados with a vastly different outlook, one that was still very much Barbadian, but immersed in a wider world. He came home with the intention of returning to New York and playing Madison Square Garden, enacting “an expectation and a pattern of return, albeit one ... of coming and going.”¹⁹³ When he returned to Barbados, that dream changed. His vision of life was no longer focused on material gain. He said: “Now I think about doing what I can for the Caribbean, not just for myself.”¹⁹⁴ The experience of migration and return helped to foster a sense of collectivity and community inherent within the expression of a national and regional identity. Gabby expresses this attitude most poignantly in his music.

Anthony “The Mighty Gabby” Carter returned to Barbados in 1976, only ten years into independence, and two years after the official revival of Crop Over.¹⁹⁵ While calypso was becoming more popular throughout the region, many in Barbados did not recognize their own calypsonians preferring to support those from the neighboring island of Trinidad. By the 1980s, however, Barbadian calypsonians had entered into the forefront of the calypso arena throughout the Caribbean and the West Indian diaspora with Gabby at the forefront. He had a strong personality, and coupled with his musical talent he could easily say, “You were either my fan or not, but never again would you ignore me.”¹⁹⁶ His most famous works are deeply rooted in Barbadian contexts, but are strongly influenced by his time abroad. With social satires and political commentaries such as “Hit It,” “Boots,” and “Jack,” Gabby was leading the pack.¹⁹⁷ He says: “A lot of what I sing comes out of my experience of having lived in the States....my aim is to paint a picture of my experience, of the West Indian experience. I want people to understand why they are the way they are.”¹⁹⁸ This approach proved fruitful for Gabby. His passions changed. Instead of looking for money, he became more passionate about his craft and how it could be put in the service of his national culture. He explains: “I have always felt that the music was first. And if you do it right, then everything else should and would fall into place.”¹⁹⁹ And things did fall into place. Making his mark on the calypso stage Gabby did eventually play Madison Square Garden in 1982. His success in promoting local culture and changing Barbadian social traditions was largely informed by and fueled by his migration experience. Singing of the West Indies, of Barbados, and of his own neighborhood of Emmerton, Gabby asserts himself strongly as a Barbadian who is part of a larger world network, but born of the soil of the island.

Among his list of achievements is the fact that Gabby is the most banned Barbadian calypsonian in history. His wit and attention to socio-political concerns has struck some politicians too strongly at times, but has also come to define his career and is central to his understanding of the role of a calypsonian within a Barbadian society. Gabby’s music has led to libel suits, including one filed by Barbadian Prime Minister Tom Adams. In relating his run in

¹⁹³ Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, 96.

¹⁹⁴ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 194.

¹⁹⁵ The revival of Crop Over will be analyzed in more detail on pages 50-55.

¹⁹⁶ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 195.

¹⁹⁷ “Hit It” (1983) uses the national sport, cricket, as a reference for an encounter between Gabby and a woman named Jill. It relies on the listener’s cultural knowledge of cricket and double entendre within Caribbean music. “Boots” (1984) is a critique of using taxpayers’ money on what Gabby sees as the unnecessary size of the Barbados Defense Force, as well their deployment to other parts of the Caribbean. “Jack” asserts Barbadians’ right to use the local beaches in the face of rising tourism and an effort to keep so-called “beach boys” from harassing tourists.

¹⁹⁸ Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 195-196.

¹⁹⁹ Carter, interview.

with the Prime Minister over the song “Cadavers,” Gabby explains the role of the calypsonian in Barbadian society:

What the role? In here!?! Crucial! ... Calypsonians CAN bring down governments. Calypsonians CAN put governments in power. ... Let me put it this way: There isn't a politician in the world that can make a speech in five minutes that will have the impact of a calypso in five minutes. ... I remember distinctly in the early days when I was sued for “Cadavers,” Eddy Grant and me. I can see the morning like now. The man came about 6:15 and knock on my door. I was living in Collymore Rock at the time. I open. “Are you Anthony Nicholas George Carter?” “Yes.” “You are hereby served with J some G and G Adams some thing.” So I started to laugh. The man said, “This is no laughing matter.” But I say, “for me it is.” And he said, “What do you mean?” I said, “this fluffing that you brought here isn't worth the paper it is written on.” And now he's like caffafled. He was bemused. He was like bamboozled. He was like, “How dare you,” you know, “tell me that my Prime Minister is sending a” uh uh some habeus corpus something or other a lot of fancy colorful language. I said, “but you don't understand. It may seem arrogant to you, but I equate myself with Bill.” “Bill? Who the hell is Bill?” I said, “some of us call him William Shakespeare. For me, his name is Bill. You understand? And when Bill was alive, you had kings, queens, princes, princesses, dutchesses, dukes, lords, countess, and counts. You had all the so-called gentry. And they all felt superior to him, and they treated him as such. But the day came when they died, and so did he. And the day is coming when Tom Adams will die, and so will me. But, my friend, no part of the world including Barbados will anybody play his speeches like they play my songs. He will never live long enough to be as important to this country as me. And I'm not being arrogant, I'm being truthful. ... If Tom Adams makes a speech today he has two chances. One it could make headline or it could make headline and front page. Today. By tomorrow evening Miss Bess will be wrapping fish with it in de market. It cannot be that important. But my songs will play all the time once they are recorded. Which one of us you think will go down in history as being more important?”²⁰⁰

Gabby defines the role of a calypsonian as an agent of social change, as a teacher, as a chronicler, and as a historian. He understands the power of well-crafted music within current socio-political debate and within social, political, and cultural history.²⁰¹ Gabby subscribes to the kind of Pan-Africanism that privileges the masses over appointed authority figures, and uses the cultural arena to hold authorities accountable to the masses. The song “Cadavers” criticizes the Prime Minister's decision to allow the importation of dead bodies from the U.S. (purportedly for medical research). Gabby manages to critique the state of the medical industry, question the judgment of the Prime Minister who sought to bring foreign exchange with the decision, and, with the only lyric repeated in the chorus, comment on the sovereignty of the nation. The repetition of the line “them importing Dracula” uses metaphor to suggest that the Prime Minister's decisions on importing U.S. commodities and catering to foreign interests above those of Barbadians is sucking the life out of the independent nation. The fact that Tom Adams found

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid. His audience and fellow musicians tout Gabby as a folk singer, calypsonian, and “an architect for socio-cultural change in Barbados.” See Gabby, *Well Done*. Ice Records Ltd. 1999.

offense even in such a craftily veiled critique and sued for libel only helped to boost Gabby's popularity and his audience's interest in the song. Gabby's response to the suit demonstrates that even post-independence, the "official" authority of the Prime Minister, in Gabby's opinion, is no match for the national sincerity of a Barbadian artist.

Gabby's social work is rooted in his role as an entertainer. George and Sharon Gmelch explain how "migrants often return home with lofty ideas about changes that they would like to see made in Barbados, but few are in a position to be innovators. Most of them simply lack the position or authority to put their ideas into practice, and some become discouraged by the resistance of local people to change."²⁰² Gabby's desire to travel and his ability to negotiate local resistance to change upon his return were both rooted in his profession as a musician. Tales of the United States reached him in the conversations he had while performing on cruise ships in Barbados. He honed his craft in New York with other Barbadians. His experiences abroad gave him the tools to proclaim his West Indianness and Barbadian pride back home. Migration provided the space for him to define and perform a local identity using the influences of a greater world. Travel provided the space for his national performance. Each site provided a sounding board and what echoed back was something distinctly Barbadian.

Such a strong Barbadian voice, even in the cultural arena, still belongs to men. The face of cultural nationalism is as masculine as the face of political nationalism. While many women migrated and returned along the same routes as Gabby, Ezra Griffith, and many others, their stories were more often than not lost in the same "man of speech" discourses noted in the politics and literature of the region. This is not to say that women calypsonians did not exist, but the arena they entered into was largely stacked against their success.²⁰³ Many of these women served largely as back-up singers for male acts. As men came to voice a Barbadian personality, women's bodies became a national resource as the nation began to create a tourist image for itself.

THE REBIRTH OF CROP OVER

One of the most pivotal events in the history of Barbadian calypso was the 1974 government-sponsored revival of Crop Over.²⁰⁴ The festival's revival in 1974 was meant to both fuel the Barbadian economy by boosting tourism in the summer season, and to promote a national pride in Barbados's cultural heritage. In the 1970s the turn toward tourism as path to economic growth and independence provided a means for Crop Over to return, bringing an audience that would include tourists from other nations, Barbadian nationals living abroad, as well as Barbadians on the island.

The contemporary Crop Over bases its timing on the older celebration, but in practice, its structure resembles the Trinidadian Carnival that many tourists are already familiar with.²⁰⁵ The festival is designed to both promote the island to tourists and to celebrate, revive, and reclaim an idyllic Barbadian heritage, yet many of the earlier characters have disappeared and are now being revived in the twenty-first century with less ceremony than their previous incarnations. In

²⁰² Gmelch, *Double Passage*, 199.

²⁰³ See chapter three pages 74; Dikobe, "Doin' She Own Thing,"

²⁰⁴ Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 32.

²⁰⁵ Stafford, "Brown and Black Middle Class."

the past forty years, Crop Over has been an extremely important venue for Barbadian talent. It incorporates all areas of the arts, although music is most distinctly at the forefront. The festival features several music performances and competitions including Pic-O-De-Crop, a calypso competition known for its social commentary; Party Monarch, a competition for the best party song of the season; Road Monarch, awarded to the singer of the most played song on the road during the road march called Kadooment; and Cohoblopot, a concert featuring various different artists and usually an invited guest from another island.²⁰⁶ Many of Barbados's most well-known artists began their performance careers in the contemporary Crop Over tradition, and with junior competitions for youth the festival continues to nurture local talent.

The contemporary Crop Over tradition uses a piece of Barbadian cultural history, and transforms it using Trinidadian influences in order to market the island to foreigners and nurture local talent. A 1988 Barbadian editorial promotes Crop Over as “steeped in history and tradition with a distinctive character all its own. It is a cultural expression of the Barbadian personality, combining his experiences of yesterday with his achievements of today and his aspirations for tomorrow.”²⁰⁷ The writer clearly imagines Barbadian personality as male while lamenting the lack of Barbadian participation in the Crop Over festival, noting that too many Barbadians are watching on the sidelines instead of joining into this “expression of the Barbadian personality.” In 1974 the Barbadian government solidified the ideal of the Barbadian personality in the Crop Over festival, positing the ideal as celebratory, talented, rooted in history but defined by innovation, and reflecting a formal education that can be expressed with acumen through local traditions; but the fissure between the ideal and the reality of Barbadian life is evident in the fact that many Barbadians still see themselves as a part of *and* apart from the cultural expressions that are meant to represent the nation.²⁰⁸

In the decades since the official revival of Crop Over, the festival has become an extremely important economic asset, but it has not yet managed to encompass, define, or promote a singular Barbadian culture. Or perhaps the Barbadian culture it promotes is just as varied and contradictory as it was in the moment of independence. The Barbadian personality that Crop Over is meant to express is still an assumed ideal that is difficult to concretely define. This is due partly to Crop Over's (and the Barbadian culture industry as a whole's) different objectives of promoting tourism and celebrating heritage. The contemporary Crop Over festival has the backing of the Barbadian government but, as scholar Curwen Best notes, “the commercialization of Crop Over has gone on. By the late 1990s it seems as though planners of the festival have not managed to marry the cultural, historical significance of the festival with its economic potential.”²⁰⁹ By 1997 the government had challenged the National Cultural

²⁰⁶ Competitions have come and go and changed over the years. In more recent years the Party Monarch competition has been fused with a Sweet Soca competition which celebrates the slower crowd favorites. In addition to the NCF sponsored events private producers also put on shows, some of which have become staples of Crop Over. For more information on Barbados Crop Over see www.barbadoscropoverfestival.com

²⁰⁷“Crop Over Festival” 1988, 3. NCF archives.

²⁰⁸ This is not to imply that Barbadians do not participate in Crop Over. They support the festival as artists, as producers, as participants, and as spectators. The spectator role is one that is performed in many different ways. Spectatorship in the festival can be active in that it involves dancing, yelling, singing along, and providing energy and support for the performers. But it is also true that this spectator role is one in which many Barbadians can passively participate, watching others enact the “expression of the Barbadian personality.” Spectators can stand on the road and watch as other Barbadians, West Indians, and tourists dance and perform. They can watch the shows and performances on TV, while others actively perform and support performers in the audience.

²⁰⁹ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 152.

Foundation to raise its own funds for the Crop Over festival.²¹⁰ As a result, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries many of these “national” events have taken on names such as Banks Lime Pic-O-De Crop finals, Cockspur Digicel Red Hot Cohoblopot, and Hennessy Cognac Kadooment. Banks is a local beer company founded by a Guyanese entrepreneur in 1961.²¹¹ Cockspur is one of the island’s oldest and largest rum distilleries. It was founded by a Danish immigrant in 1884 and has expanded into an international market.²¹² Lime and Digicel are communications companies that operate throughout the Caribbean. The marriage between culture and economics that Best hopes for happens in the private sponsorship of alcohol and communications companies. As the birthplace of rum, alcohol has a prominent place within Barbadian culture and consequently within the lyrical content of West Indian music. Sponsorship from alcohol companies provides much-needed capital to the festival and the libations to encourage the spirit of “letting go” that is a central part of the festival atmosphere. In this way the sponsorship has married economic and cultural goals, but the image of drunken crowds of people may not be the image a young nation would like to promote on the tourist market, especially a young nation with a reputation of social conservatism and respectability.

The cultural and the economic needs of the island are still at odds with the ideological entanglements of Barbados’s main cultural influences. The heavy colonial influence of Protestant England and the retentions and reclamations of an African heritage are constantly contending for primacy within official representations of Barbadian culture. In his book *Roots to Popular Culture* Curwen Best explains how the cultural revolution (marked by an embrace and support of Barbadian culture, the founding of the National Culture Foundation, and the success of Barbadian artists at home and abroad) that happened in Barbados in the 1980s and 1990s still reflects the conflict between these two cultural influences, and how the embrace of cultural nationalism has required the nation to rethink which model will have primacy within the ideal of an independent Barbadian culture.²¹³ African influenced practices are promoted during the Crop Over festival, but not without critique. The festival walks a fine line between these two cultural influences promoting an African aesthetic while taking care to at least monitor indications of “excess,” lest it get out of control. The Spiritual Baptists, who made waves in Barbadian society in the late 1950s with their assertion of Black divinity, have become a staple to the opening ceremonies of Crop Over.²¹⁴ This gives the festival a religious blessing entrenched in a reclaimed African heritage. The atmosphere of “letting go” in which participants are encouraged to freely move their bodies and otherwise “get on bad and wine and do the things that we would not do normally” is associated with a generic African heritage.²¹⁵ Crop Over is an arena in which the prim and proper takes a back seat, but that Protestant influence does not entirely disappear and the two major cultural influences of the island interact often in bewildering ways.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Started in 1984, the National Cultural Foundation is a government organization whose mission is to preserve and promote Barbadian culture. The Crop Over Festival has become one of the foundation’s main responsibilities.

²¹¹ See www.banksbeer.com

²¹² See www.cockspurrum.com/history/history.html

²¹³ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 231.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 178.

²¹⁵ Rupee. “What Happens in de Party.” *Ion I*. Atlantic Records. 2004; While many editorials and even the National Cultural Foundation make connections between Barbadian culture and the Igbo culture of West Africa, there are other indications of a Congolese influence and most iterations of Barbados’s African heritage are non-specific relying on a generic image of Africa.

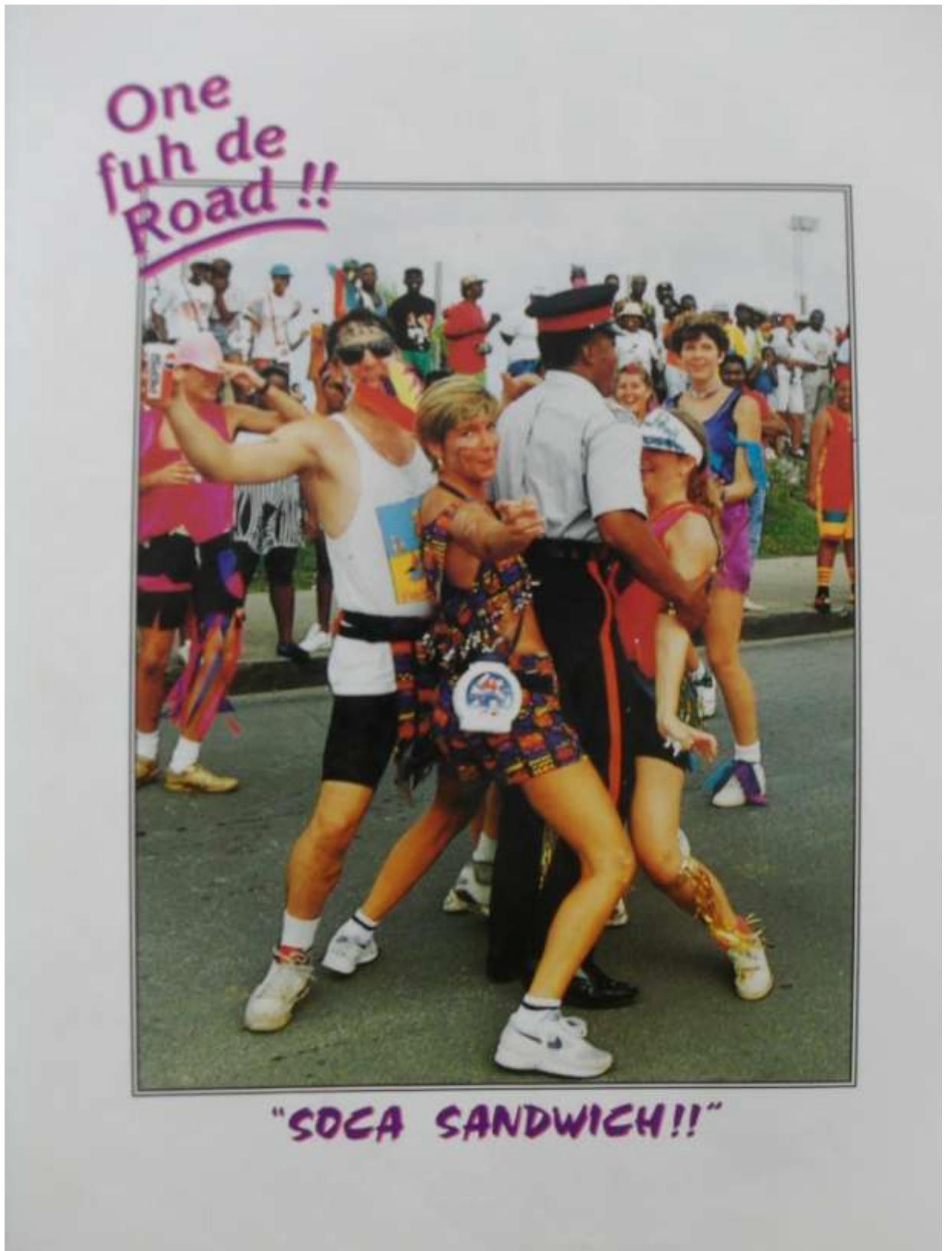


Figure 2.6

Such an interaction is evident in Figure 2.6, which is the back cover to a pamphlet, “Crop Over 1993.” Pamphlets such as these are produced each year after the festival and feature photos and stories of each of the nationally sponsored events. They are widely available for sale and can be purchased in most gas stations with the daily paper. Within this photo a few white (presumably) tourists embrace the Crop Over tradition of “letting go” by encircling a member of Barbados’s Royal Police Force as black Barbadians look on.²¹⁶ The Crop Over festival was revived in order to promote tourism, so the sight of these tourists could be interpreted as a successful effort. Wearing the remnants of Kadooment costumes and all smiles, these revelers seem to have fully embraced the Crop Over spirit. But the photo does not show Barbadians expressing the celebratory Barbadian personality of Crop Over advertisements, but rather tourists embracing and/or imitating the spirit of the festival.

The presence of black Barbadians is important to the efficacy of the image. The Barbadian police officer, rigid and faceless in the photo, represents that other part of Barbados’s cultural history, the Protestant influence complete with the kind of stoicism that would rival a nineteenth century English gentleman. His presence signifies authority, but he does not actively enact that authority in the captured moment. Within the photo his body is available for the pleasure of the tourists and the authority of his position makes him even more attractive. Barbados becomes a safe place for fun. One in which even the police embrace a spirit of abandon while still vigilantly maintaining the posture of authority and order.²¹⁷ The black onlookers smile and dance on the sidelines. While throughout the rest of the pamphlet black participants are prominently featured dancing and performing, the final image is one of passive involvement. The “soca sandwich” is encased in whiteness. That whiteness is embracing what is seen as an “African trait” of Barbadian culture, while the black Barbadians in this final image passively observe a figure of national authority enacting the stoicism of a colonial position of authority.

Interactions such as this one represent the ongoing contradictions of the Crop Over festival. The economic objective of the contemporary form of the festival necessitates private investment and relies on the foreign income of tourists. Without the financial backing of the alcohol and communications companies, the festival is hardly possible. Culturally, the tug of war between European and African influences is highlighted even as presumably African influences are emphasized. Yet, the representations of the festival tie Barbadian culture to historical myths of the Caribbean as consumable, exotic, and leisurely—myths that in promoting its tourist brand, the Barbadian government both exploits and tries to move beyond. The fact that such contradictions can be illustrated in a single photo, and that that photo is used to promote the festival speaks to the cultural ambiguity surrounding the ideal of the Barbadian personality.

The cultural ambiguity evident in the contemporary Crop Over celebration is a part of the historical heritage of Barbados. Pre or post-independence, it is a fundamental element of Barbadian national identity. This element is illuminated most strikingly in the cultural arena. And in post-independence Barbados, culture has become the leading arena in redefining a Barbadian identity as Curwen Best notes when he writes “contemporary Barbados resonates with a cultural vibrancy which is part of its own thrust toward global self-actualization.”²¹⁸ “Little England” has become a myth, and the ideal of the Barbadian personality in the twentieth and

²¹⁶Considering the relatively small population of white Barbadians and the rates of tourism during the Crop Over season, I think it is statistically safe to assume that the white participants in the photo are tourists.

²¹⁷ See Thompson, *Eye on the Tropics* for a historical account of the image of black Barbadian policeman.

²¹⁸ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 232.

twenty-first centuries strives for that “something more” so sought after by the characters in George Lamming’s novels. This new ideal is rooted in an African heritage and diasporic connections, but the history of the island and the ideals of the present and future continue to contradict each other, and “at the beginning of the new millennium, the nation still strives to come to terms with its own contradictions. It is now faced with even more complexities related to its past, and to its present condition within a new global context.”²¹⁹ Issues of migration, ownership, and national ideals are present in the production and policing of the island’s popular culture forms, most notably its music. This history exists in the echoes of tuk, a recognizable piece of Barbadian heritage that has continued within the music targeted at Barbadians, but also in the tourist industry where the commodification of Barbadian culture raises questions of ownership and often erases histories of Caribbean innovation even within celebrations of heritage.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 231.

Chapter Three

Caribbean Queen: Barbadian Femininity

You must have confidence!

.....
 Boy you always take me higher, Yuh fill me with your fire
 You know I want your sweetness, So shower me with niceness
 All a de gyals dat know dem pon top,
 One man alone, yuh nah got a lot
 Beware how yuh dress, yuh got de place lock
 Victoria Secret de place where yuh shop
 Walk pon de road, men eye dem a pop
 Bustin a de dance like a real coppertop
 Wine and go down and come right back up
 A sting where yuh sting and a shop where you shop²²⁰

On the 11th of November 2011, the popular U.S. morning show *Today* ended its “Where in World is Matt Lauer” week on the Southern beaches of Barbados. Along with demonstrations of Barbadian cuisine, local sites of interests, and a bartending lesson, the show called on Soca Queen Alison Hinds to represent traditional Barbadian culture. Accompanied by stilt walkers and dancers in Kadooment costumes Hinds explains the standards of good soca music – “good music, good hook lines, a very good party song, it makes people happy”—before giving a lesson about Barbados’s Crop Over festival.²²¹ The camera pans through a gauntlet of costumed Barbadians as Hinds details how shaggy bears represent the spirits of Barbadian ancestors and Mother Sally symbolizes fertility.²²² The segment ends with Matt Lauer calling on Hinds to display what she is perhaps best known for, her movement. Alison Hinds gives the *Today* show anchors a *wukking up* lesson. As the “Soca Queen” Alison has staked her career on such performances of Barbadian culture and her ability to translate it to those abroad. Many of her songs package this skill in a form that seeks to display and empower, celebrate and create a distinct Barbadian femininity that speaks to women across the world.

Popular in 2003, the song “Confidence” reflects an attitude prominent in Barbadian women and promoted by popular culture and government agencies in post-independence Barbados. In each verse Alison Hinds addresses one man before mobilizing women in general, employing both standard English and the more colloquial Barbadian language. The song addresses physicality, the public display of women’s bodies, interpersonal relations with men, and it exudes an individual feminine power and the collective realization of that power that is central to performances of post-independence Barbadian femininity.

Throughout the island’s history Barbadian women have straddled the mores of a colonially defined puritanical respectability, various African retentions, and the material realities

²²⁰ Hinds, “Confidence.”

²²¹ “Where in the World is Matt Lauer.”

²²² See chapter two, pages 35-37.

of living in an economically bounded colonial society.²²³ Post-independence, Barbadian women have still had to juggle these differing definitions of “appropriate” femininity. Public performances of femininity have always been strictly policed by Barbadian society, and women’s public images have always been a contested arena in the Caribbean.²²⁴ This chapter draws on Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic in order to explain the many ways in which Barbadian women have negotiated their own performances of femininity and navigated those performances within the patriarchal structures of colonialism and nationalism. Lorde defines “the erotic [as] a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.”²²⁵ For Barbadian women the erotic is both an individual and a diasporic resource. Jacqueline Nassy Brown uses the term diasporic resource to highlight the ways in which local populations strategically draw on specific aspects or practices of other populations within the diaspora.²²⁶ Such a resource has been useful to Barbadian women throughout history whose societal roles have been proscribed as private, but who live and move in public ways. Barbadian women call on diasporic resources throughout the African diaspora, and in the post-independence moment their African heritage interacts with a black nationalist and black feminist ethos in the form of the African Queen ideal.

I use the public image of Alison Hinds in order to illuminate the contested arena of public femininity. Ultimately, I argue that Barbadian women rely on the erotic in order to define themselves within Barbadian society and the wider world, that they employ diasporic resources such as the trope of the Queen in order to negotiate different definitions of femininity, and that Alison Hinds’s changing image is one example of how this is evident within the arena of popular culture.

Hinds’s performance as a Queen expands the ideal of respectable Barbadian femininity beyond its previous iterations based on the model of the “English lady.” Even in this expansion, however, Hinds’s representations of Barbados, Barbadian women, and the Caribbean region are inevitably restrictive. She offers a persuasive model of female power that is still largely conservative, heteronormative, and, by focusing on collective power through individual self-respect, does not overtly threaten systematic patriarchal structures. Nonetheless, Alison Hinds’s performance as a Queen offers a marriage of female empowerment and national representation that acknowledges and bridges the commonalities and differences between gendered, national, and class identities.

The chapter begins with a brief historical look at the ways in which Barbadian women have continually transgressed their proscribed roles in society before analyzing key performances in Alison Hinds’s career. The chapter ends with an interrogation of how embodiments of Barbadian femininity are depicted in popular culture representations that circulate in expanding markets.

²²³ Throughout this chapter I use the term Barbadian women, except in the historical section where I find it necessary to make a clear distinction. I am focusing specifically on Afro-Barbadian women and my use of the wider term Barbadian women is not meant to erase the minority populations, but to emphasize that post-independence Barbados is imagined as a black nation due to both the rhetoric of nation-building during the time period and the racial statistics of the island throughout its history.

²²⁴ Edmonson, “Public Spectacles,” 1.

²²⁵ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 53.

²²⁶ Brown, “Black Liverpool, Black America,” 298.

MARKET WOMEN AND THE MARKETS OF WOMEN

Barbadian colonial society based its definition of femininity on the model of the English “lady.” The ideal was modeled on upper class whiteness, and therefore excluded the majority of Barbadian women. Even within the white minority on the island, the poorer classes, having to labor for a living, were excluded from the dainty, dependent, prim ideal. This definition was proffered as a model for all women, but the practices of colonialism excluded most of the female population of Barbados from accessing this ideal. As Erna Brodber notes in her 1982 study of the perceptions and stereotypes of Caribbean women, a lack of access to the ideal did not prevent its internalization. She finds that in Barbados and Jamaica “the models, were internalized as ‘right’ if not just as ‘possible.’ Today they are part of woman’s psychic landscape and are influencing women’s behavior.”²²⁷ Within the colonial setting, Barbadian women were inculcated with a gendered ideal that they did not have access to, but internalized nonetheless. Although the proscribed ideal was rigid and regulated, Barbadian women have always defied regulation and performed their own femininity. This section will briefly explore the “non-ideal” models of femininity that the majority of the population performed historically: on the plantations, in the market, and within the business sector.

During the slave period (1625-1838) women (Afro-Barbadian women in particular) had proscribed roles within the society. Within this plantation society, the majority of Barbadian women lived as slaves on sugar plantations. Their roles varied within the plantocracy system including cooks, servants, market women, and field hands. Female field hands were responsible not only for their own work, but also for socializing the children on the plantation into the slavery system. Historian Hilary Beckles writes that their lives were “characterized by excessive labouring, brutalization, malnutrition, vulnerability to nutritional related diseases, high mortality, and fear of abandonment when superannuated. They were the backbone of the agricultural enterprise, and therefore suffered the worst abuses.”²²⁸ It is important to note also the psychological abuse that these women suffered. Their role in socializing the children into the slave system put the idea of “community mothering” at odds with the best interest of the black community that they and the children belonged to. This is most evident in the apprenticeship period (1833-1838) when slavery was gradually abolished and children under six were no longer enslaved, but their parents and older siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles were. Many young children were turned away by their “apprenticing” families in the hopes that turning them out on their own would be less psychologically damaging than witnessing the slave system.

Although Afro-Barbadian women have “suffered the worst abuses,” or perhaps because of this fact, they managed to exercise agency in unusual ways. A number of women carved out their own economic and social spaces, or at the very least, redefined the boundaries of their spaces within Barbadian society. The reports of runaways, the hucksters (street vendors) who openly and constantly defied the law, and the hoteliers who gained prominence within the colonial system of slavery all defied the expectations of “appropriate” behavior throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. In a society built to uphold an elite (largely male) landholding class, the power that they assumed and exerted posed a serious threat to colonial order, which depended on their adherence to rigidly defined social roles.

²²⁷ Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, 55.

²²⁸ Beckles, *Afro-Caribbean Women*, 32-33.

Some women became habitual runaways who repeatedly faced the consequences of recapture, including imprisonment, flogging, branding with hot irons, and other forms of torture. One example of a habitual runaway is Quashebah from Codrington estate who ran away five times in nine years.²²⁹ The story of another young woman, Amelia, shows the strong family connections that serve as an impetus for such maroonage. At sixteen years old she was bought, went “home” for one day before “absenting herself for three weeks.”²³⁰ She went to see her parents, and continued to do so, causing the consternation of her owner. Women such as Quashebah and Amelia were adamant in determining their own freedom of movement, and in a slave society they were seen as a threat to slave-owners who hoped their unabashed anti-slavery sentiments would not spread throughout the entire slave community.²³¹ Outside of the plantations, Afro-Barbadian women defined their own markets in Barbados’s limited urban settings.

Barbadian women have always had a very public presence in society despite the colonial ideal of private femininity. Such a presence was, more often than not, tied to commodity and sexuality, two themes which would haunt public images of Barbadian women for centuries to come. Dating back to the seventeenth century, Afro-Barbadian women could be seen as beggars, hucksters, and hoteliers in the streets of Bridgetown. Superannuated women would often be turned away from plantations and left to fend for themselves. Many of these women found their way to Bridgetown and survived through begging off the city population.²³²

The tradition of hucksters is a rich one. Throughout the slavery period some enslaved women were entrusted to sell their owners’ goods in the Bridgetown market.²³³ Other women sold their own wares. The economic and social freedom of vending in town often posed a threat to the colonial order, as evidenced in the enactment of various forms of legislature directed against these women. Their persistence is evinced by the fact that so many laws, acts, and bills were enacted. Clearly the legislative efforts were not working. Huckster women often ignored these acts and continued to expand their market presence throughout the late 1600s into the 1700s.²³⁴ They also ignored legislation aimed at the routes of runaways. Beckles describes a runaway named Sarah, who was “well known about the town as she has been for some time in the habit of selling dry goods.”²³⁵ Sarah, like others, disregarded the laws and went about defining the spaces of her world. The fact that she was well known and easily recognizable did not deter her in any way from redefining her mobility, but speaks to the sense of community that slaves held in harboring each other in public and in private regardless of the laws meant to prevent such conspiracy.

The visibility of huckster women comprised a large part of the conflict that their presence brought to the public market. Their physical bodies were on display in a space designed for the exchange of commodities. Since many hucksters were slaves, the slave society had already

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²³² *Ibid.*, 29-31.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 48. While the expectation was that they would take the profits back to their owners, many women took the money and ran. Those who were literate and who spoke “good” English had a greater chance of escaping slavery as they were less likely to be questioned.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 49-59. Acts against huckstering include a 1688 law, two 1694 bills that were never enacted into law, a 1708 law to eradicate huckstering by slaves, a 1773 law, a 1774 law, and another in 1779.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

defined them as commodities to be sold and purchased, but the agency they exerted by selling their own wares in the public market space separated them from the commodities that they sold. At the same time their public presence allowed them to be visually consumed as spectacles. In a society that marked “appropriate” femininity as private, such a public presence wreaked havoc on the ideological order. It placed huckster women outside of “appropriate” femininity. Colonial society could not view them as “real” women, but they were real enough to be sexual, to be a threat. The market place became a place of tension between women and city constables, often leading to violent confrontations. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Barbadian officials had built stocks adjacent to the marketplace, which transformed the marketplace into a site of public flogging and confinement.²³⁶ Although the market diversified, including more clothing, accessories, and tourist memorabilia, huckster women selling food became a fixture in the landscape of Bridgetown, and the tradition is still alive and well in the twenty-first century.

Definitions of Barbadian femininity are built on public images of Barbadian women and how these images interact with notions of the public and the private. The state, the church, and the educational system built colonial ideologies upon the kind of liberalism that defined the public sphere as male and the private sphere as female, but the colonial ideals of femininity rarely fit the material and social realities of Barbados.²³⁷ As far back as the seventeenth century women worked both within the home and out in public. They played an important role in the Barbadian market, making a living for themselves and often contributing to the family budget.²³⁸ Aside from the hucksters and beggars noted above, the most public women in Barbadian slave society were hoteliers.

The figure of the female hotelier is where notions of the public and private as well as themes of commodity and sexuality collide most violently. Historical records show women as tavern/inn owners in Barbados as early as the mid-1700s. Jill Hamilton notes how “historians tend to refer to these women as infamous rather than famous but they were recognized as being resourceful, independent of spirit and having the necessary managerial expertise to enable them to be successful business women.”²³⁹ As public businesses that provide private spaces the hotel/tavern/inn bridges the world of man and woman within early colonial ideology. As business owners, however, female hoteliers still transgress their role within such ideology. What they are, in fact, doing is selling privacy; most of their establishments were rumored to be brothels. Popular memory and the customs of the time heavily suggest that these were sites prostitutes may have utilized, if not actual institutions of prostitution. Within the 1700s “prostitution was a means of social security for the women involved and many liaisons led to the ownership of property which in turn generated independence and the means to enter other lines of business if so desired.”²⁴⁰ Suspicions of prostitution, then, served as both accusations of impropriety and markers of the possibility of power where the sexual and the economic paths would meet. The sale of such private spaces as a room in an inn connotes the sale of the private domain, the female domain, thus placing such female business owners in a cloud of commodity and sexuality within the public eye.

²³⁶ Ibid., 58. See also Fuentes, “Buried Landscapes” for a more detailed account of sites of female punishment in Bridgetown.

²³⁷ Barriteau, “Liberal Ideology and Contradiction,” 437

²³⁸ Hamilton, *Women of Barbados*, 24.

²³⁹ Ibid, 28.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 34-35.

The most famous of these women is Rachael Pringle Polgreen. Polgreen is arguably the single-most well-known individual woman in the popular history of Barbados. Her legacy is built around both archival records and popular speculation. In memory she has become both historical figure and comical caricature. One of the most salient tales of her and her Royal Navy Hotel narrates how England's Prince William Henry and some sailors drunkenly rampaged the hotel and the women within, destroying much of the property and throwing Pringle herself out into the street on her backside. As the story is told, Pringle, a comparatively dark-skinned mixed-race Barbadian woman calmly deferred to the royalty of this white English prince without comment or trouble. But the next day she served the Prince a bill for all of the property he and his party had destroyed, showing that she indeed meant business.²⁴¹

Popular memory of Polgreen paints her as a woman well versed in various public and private performances: "proper" colonial femininity (deference to power), Barbadian femininity (resourcefulness and unabashed agency when necessary), business owner, mistress, ex-slave, slave owner, sexual object, sexual agent, and overall savvy woman. Her personal narrative has long since been overshadowed by her image in public memory, an image buttressed by a single surviving visual representation. The reproduction of this representation, an etching, polices the boundaries of her legacy while serving as a site of speculation. Its wide circulation on cultural objects within the tourist market has posthumously provided Polgreen with a large audience while at the same time silencing her existence as she has become more caricature than person.

Polgreen's body, her legacy, her person has been exaggerated by history to the extent that her reality is questionable. She existed—that much we know. But the details of her existence get lost in popular fantasy and scant records. Marisa Fuentes writes, "From the only existing visual representation, Polgreen's race, gender and sexuality have become so concretely fixed as to make an alternative image of her body and lived experiences nearly impossible."²⁴² Popular memory of her, however, is still quite complex. It points to both the power of commodity as a business owner and slave owner, and to Polgreen's enactment of autoerotic power, one in which she uses her status as mistress and possible prostitute to empower herself within a social and economic order that had little room for powerful black women. Polgreen's image is an extreme manifestation of a public woman in Barbadian society, one whose publicity forever marked her within stereotypes of sexuality and commodity, and whose memory clouds the many exercises and understandings of her power as a Barbadian woman. Her memory, and the ways in which it was caricatured, serve as a reminder of the relationship between public image and private reality. The former often overshadows the latter.

²⁴¹ Connell, "Prince William Henry, 157-164; Fuentes, "Buried Landscapes," 41-42; Hamilton, *Women of Barbados*, 28-30; Orderson, *Creoleanna*, 79.

²⁴² Fuentes, "Buried Landscapes," 33.

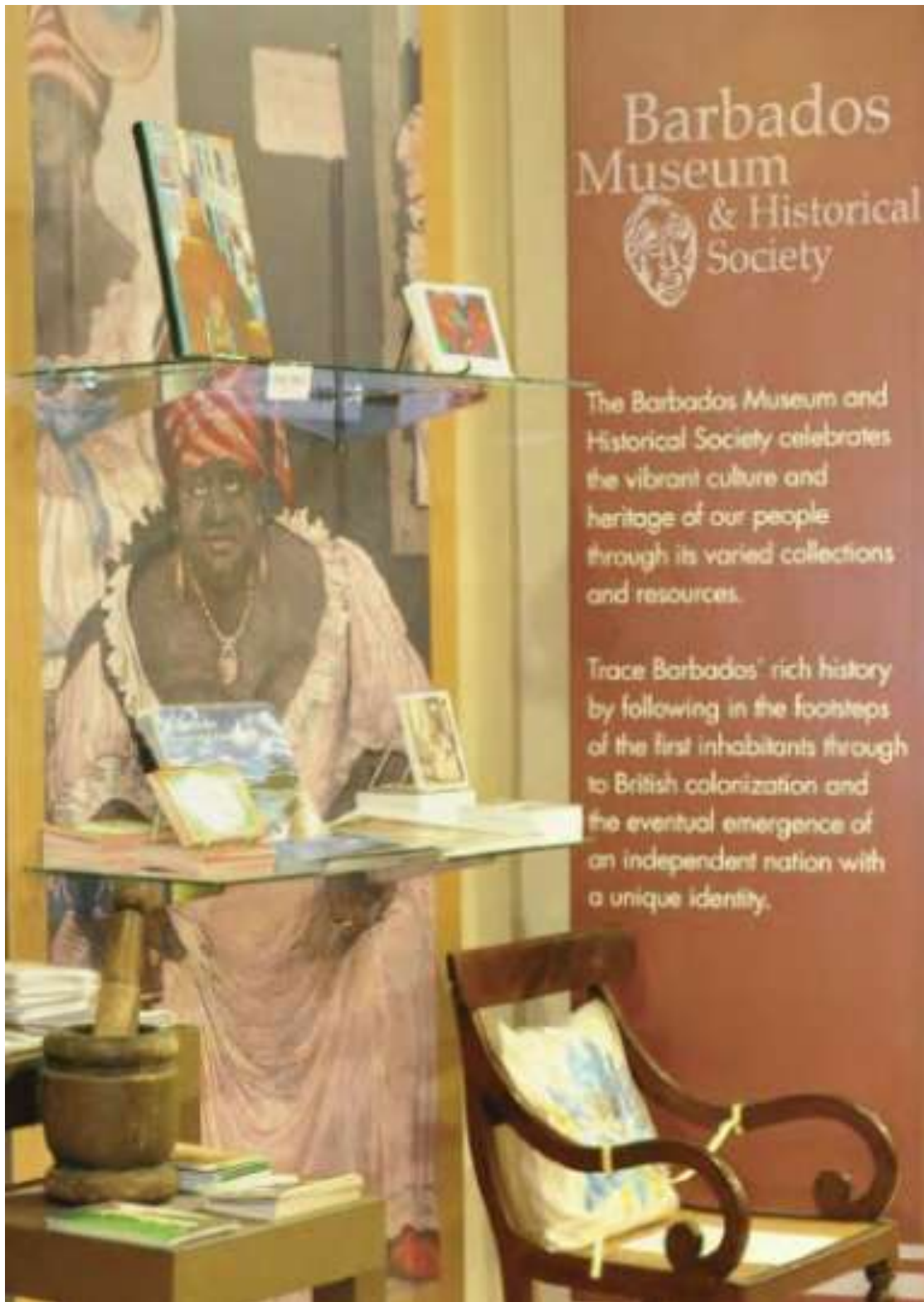


Figure 3.1

The common image of Polgreen on display in Barbados's National Museum

MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND WOMAN POWER

Fola saw her mother shiver and wilt, yet watched her as *this woman*. And Fola was grateful for the night and Camillon's discovery. She didn't believe a word of what Camillon had said about her mother and his friend; but the truth held no importance for her now. It made no difference to the fearful certainty which Camillon had established in her mind. This was the way they had seen her mother. She existed for them in a certain way; and this way of *seeing* was now the only truth that mattered.²⁴³

In this passage of his 1960 novel *Seasons of Adventure*, George Lamming shows the ways in which daughters grow into mothers, the exchange of power in such a realization, and the importance of public image in how Barbadian society defines women. At this social gathering, daughter and mother look almost indistinguishable. Their bodies are the same. Fola has grown into the one her mother Agnes never grew out of. When Camillon mistakes them for sisters, Fola, the daughter, is horrified that her mother would be seen as a sexual object. Her horror stems from the similarity between them and the fact that Camillon's view of her mother is no different than her own.

Her mother's actions and Fola's own ideas take a back seat to the image of her mother held by the young men who approach her. For a moment the image overtakes the erotic power silent within both mother and daughter. Her mother becomes "*this woman*"—this sexual woman who can manipulate men with the sound of her laugh, the movement of her body, and the exuberance of her every move.²⁴⁴ And because of the physical similarities between Fola and her mother, because they literally look the same, Fola understands that this view can very easily be placed upon her. She rejects her mother, not because of anything that her mother has done, but because the men have seen her mother as "*this woman*," and Fola wants to be more. Her rejection of her mother is the rejection of the perception, of the image. Fola, like many actual women, grows to understand how her society perceives women. She enacts a very specific inner strength, what Audre Lorde calls erotic power, in order to find her own ways to navigate such perceptions and build her own public image.

Using the works of popular Barbadian literary figures, memoirs, and historical studies, this section argues that women are both revered as mothers and caretakers and reviled as "naturally" manipulative beings in Barbadian society; that motherhood validates female sexuality within the public eye; and that Barbadian girls and women are socialized to negotiate their own public images as they grow into womanhood.

The ideal of the nuclear family (or, at the very least, the role that motherhood plays in dominant discourses and social practices of femininity) has tempered stereotypes of the hypersexual Barbadian woman. Gender studies scholars Eudine Barriteau and Jacqui Alexander both detail the ways in which Caribbean nation-states reduce women's bodies to the role of reproduction.²⁴⁵ If society defines a woman by her body, by the sexual potential of her body, then she is also defined by the reproductive abilities of her sexuality. Historically barren women found themselves ridiculed as "mules" in Barbados. Without the ability to reproduce, society questioned their femininity, and their humanity, framing them as worthless to the rest of the

²⁴³ Lamming, *Seasons of Adventure*, 152.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁴⁵ Alexander, "Not Just (Any)Body," 6; Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 96.

Barbadian nation; they could neither reproduce loyal colonial subjects, nor new nation builders. Without the possibility of reproduction, the sexuality of these women becomes suspect. If they are not sexual for the sake of maternity, they must be sexual for the sake of pleasure, or even worse as a form of manipulation. Motherhood, then, serves as a public declaration of the fulfillment of a private role, one which marks the female body as sexual in a socially acceptable way. But even motherhood is not enough to escape the image of hypersexuality as we see in *Seasons of Adventure*.

After an encounter at the Vice President's ball, Fola confronts the main divide between her mother and herself. Because she has never known her father, Fola sees her mother as a whore. Fola is plagued by this lack of personal history, and she shapes her image of Agnes, her mother, around the silence surrounding her own birth. The way the men at the ball speak of Agnes confirms Fola's image of her mother as a whore. Fola has never used the terms mother, Mom, mum, preferring to call Agnes by her name or some variant, and as she looks at Agnes now as *this woman* she sees it is because she struggles to reconcile the image of whore with that of mother.

The sexual divisions of colonial Barbadian society place family within the woman's domain and sexual enjoyment within that of the man's. For a man to father several children was expected and bolsters a sense of masculinity built upon virility. But for a woman to do the same—to enjoy, express, and explore her sexuality, to be an erotic woman—contradicted the colonial ideal of femininity. Women who (somewhat) openly enjoyed sex, and the power and pleasure surrounding it transgressed such colonial ideals. Others, who still abided by the structures of respectability, could still be deemed inappropriate, showing the complexity of the ways in which sexuality, pleasure, and commodity interact. Lamming's character of Agnes is an example of such complexity. Her motherhood does not automatically grant her respectability because her child is born out of wedlock and the father is unknown. She marries into respectability by partnering with a policeman, but because of her youthful appearance other men still mistake her for a possible sexual conquest.

In Barbados the colonial and nationalist ideal of woman as mother, ideally within a nuclear family, is dependent upon a heteronormative discourse. There are three reasons for this: 1) Homosexuality within the Caribbean operates largely as an open secret. Such a secret would not be openly divulged in the public views and performances of femininity. 2) The public view of female sexuality and public performances of sexuality within Barbados often have little to do with actual sexual practice. In this sense whether an actual partner is male or female is irrelevant as the enactment of erotic power does not rely on a partner per se, but the idea of one, although the discourse is heteronormative in that it is assumed any partnership would be a heterosexual one. 3) Motherhood in particular is the most public performance of what is "ideally" a private femininity, and while motherhood betrays a heterosexual act it says very little about sexual preference.

The relationship between the image of the mother and images of women in general is a complex and harried one. Psychologist Ezra Griffith writes in his memoir "It did not take me long to recognize that the word 'woman' generally meant mother, even if it did not mean wife."²⁴⁶ As a Barbadian child in the 1950s he understands "woman" as caretaker, as responsible social arbiter. Women are the private workers that keep both the family and social order running, and that is how Griffith defines the role of mother. Still while respect for one's mother is

²⁴⁶ Griffith, *I'm Your Father, Boy*, 77.

mandated by society, it does not necessarily extend to the respect of all women. Griffith's childhood conflation of the two terms does not translate into the behavior toward mothers and toward other women.

In independence era Barbados there was a public perception that the role of motherhood, the responsibility of raising a child, and the effort to give that child as much as possible, could lead women to be manipulative in achieving their goals, which were centered on the welfare of the child. Children were socialized into respecting their mothers with the understanding that it was motherhood that guided their actions. The young male characters in Lamming's 1953 *In the Castle of My Skin* echo such a perception and are firm in their view of the discipline their mothers mete out:

“She says she'll beat the life out of you when she catch you,” I said.

“It ain't the first time she say that,” he said.

“But she will do it this time,” I said. “Look the blow she give you in the ear.”

“I ain't got feelings any more,” he said. “I get sort of hardened to it.” He looked up and smiled. His face was wet and heavy and remote.

“But I won't ever hit back,” he said, “whatever she do me I won't ever hit back.”

“You ain't to do that,” I said. “They say you'll be cursed if you hit a mother.”²⁴⁷

In the context of their time, the 1930s, the boys understand that the physical violence their mothers inflict is based on the religious tenet of “spare the rod, spoil the child.” The boys, in turn, become hardened to the physical abuse that they understand as an expression of a mother's love. Such love toughens them in a way seen as appropriate for boys in early twentieth century Barbadian society.²⁴⁸ Such hardening is a consequence of the kind of socialization that Barbadian politician Dame Billie A. Miller describes in the introduction to Jill Hamilton's *Women of Barbados*. Miller writes, “This is the Caribbean woman who raises her sons to observe the commandment—disrespect all other women excepting me.”²⁴⁹ Within popular imaginaries such harshness, whether it be physical discipline of a child or the use of sex or wit to provide for said child, becomes expected and excused as a “natural” consequence of motherhood, and by extension “complete” womanhood. One is to honor one's mother knowing that she wants the best for you, her child, but one must also repel her overarching reach in order to define oneself as an adult, and excuse any offenses as “natural” expressions of womanhood. In this sense mothers are both honored and repelled. Women are imagined as dangerous, but the danger of a mother is acceptable and excusable as a form of love. The danger of other women, however, is something to be negotiated, preempted, and avoided.

While motherhood validates female sexuality as a productive force within Barbadian society, it also provides a wide brush with which to paint the image of women as manipulative, and publicly marks the sexuality of a woman. If a woman has given birth, she must be a sexual being, and to acknowledge a woman as a sexual being is to point to the danger of her using sex as a manipulative tool. This is what horrifies George Lamming's *Seasons of Adventure* character Fola in the epigraph to this section. She sees the lens with which the men of society are looking at her mother.

²⁴⁷ Lamming, *In the Castle*, 13.

²⁴⁸ Bailey, et. al., *Family and Gender Relations*, 18. See also Downes, “Boys of Empire.”

²⁴⁹ Hamilton, *Women of Barbados*, ii.

On her eighteenth birthday Fola finds strength on the edge of madness as this encounter with her mother Agnes reaches its height. Lamming writes, “Her rage had given her an impossible strength; freed from any loyalty. She wanted to be a traitor in the name of some original truth.”²⁵⁰ This moment is more than typical teenage rebellion. Fola is opening a chasm between herself and her mother that is meant to free her from the horrific secret of her conception, and from the constraints of the patriarchal gaze that overdetermines her mother from without.²⁵¹ In this moment Fola finds her erotic power. Audre Lorde defines the erotic as a hidden resource manifested through action; it is deeply female, and a source of personal power.²⁵² This is the “original truth” Fola wants to return to even if it means betraying her mother and the standards for women of the time.

This erotic power has been a source of strength for centuries of Barbadian women, so much so that it has become a definitive performance of Barbadian femininity. The characters in Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* explain: ‘I tell yuh, Silla,’ Florrie Trotman said once shaking her head, ‘you’s a real-real Bajan woman. You can bear up under I don’ know what.’²⁵³ Written in 1959, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is a coming of age story for a Barbadian community abroad. At this point in the story Silla has already craftily sold off her husband Deighton’s dreams in order to have money for a house in New York. This is the course other Barbadians have taken, and the one Silla views as best for the family. Even after Deighton retaliates by spending all of the money, the Barbadian community supports Silla’s efforts even if she has to go to the loan shark. Silla attempts to manipulate Deighton in order to do what she sees as best for their family, but her efforts are foiled by Deighton’s charm. The strength displayed by this “real-real Bajan woman” is a front, a mask she wears for her Barbadian friends who gather in her basement kitchen on weekends to knead, stir, and partake of the tastes of home. The sentiment of perceived strength is echoed later in the text in another character who her son describes as “the small hard dry type of West Indian who lives endlessly and endures all.”²⁵⁴ It is the daughter protagonist Selina who sees past the mask of endurance these women wear. She knows of the restless nights of tears and worry, and like Lamming’s Fola she charts a different path for herself.

The ethos that shapes the figure of the mother is based on a stereotype of strength that is predicated on the social conditions of Barbadian society and the Caribbean region as a whole. At historical points of societal change, Barbadian women become the martyrs of society. In the slave period, the abuse of women made it necessary for them to demonstrate the most resistance. The same holds true post-Emancipation and throughout the independence era. Such an attitude is socialized early into young girls. In a study of girls in the Caribbean, researchers found that from an early age they are taught self-reliance, flexibility, a willingness to adapt to any situation, and to seek solutions for themselves; all trademarks of the “strength” of Caribbean women.²⁵⁵ The image of the strong Caribbean woman is built upon women’s self-reliance and self-actualization,

²⁵⁰ Lamming, *Seasons of Adventure*, 154.

²⁵¹ Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 116.

²⁵² Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 53.

²⁵³ Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 200.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

²⁵⁵ Bailey, et.al. *Family and Gender Relations*, 86.

both manifestations of an inner erotic power. Caribbean nation-states use this image of the strong Caribbean woman both to the benefit and the detriment of Caribbean women.²⁵⁶

The power of women within Barbadian society has long been a source of concern to various power structures and a site of misunderstanding within society in general. Throughout Barbadian history, the economic construction of society has necessitated that women work, making a degree of independence, autonomy, and assertiveness an integral part of Barbadian femininity.²⁵⁷ Within post-independence Barbadian society especially, the growing gap between men and women in terms of education and job opportunities became the subject of many speeches, studies, and editorials. The stereotype that constructs Barbadian women (and Caribbean women, black women, and women of color in general) as hypersexual and sexually manipulative is still very much alive, and such post-independence concerns have given rise to various other stereotypes of Barbadian women as hard, conniving, manipulative and morally bereft. On the other hand, nationalist and feminist movements, of the 1960s and 1970s respectively, have provided at least the possibility of a different view, one wherein women are respected as citizens and as people worthy of respect.

The popular ideology that places domestic issues firmly and almost exclusively within the domain of women creates complicated relationships between the state, women, and men, and such complicated relationships manifest themselves in society's image of women. Childrearing is seen as a female practice and although the prescribed role of the breadwinner falls on the man (within the heterosexual nuclear family ideal), it is the woman who is responsible for ensuring that the money the man brings into the household is properly distributed to cover the basic needs of the family.²⁵⁸ The burden of preparing children for success, maintaining their health, and providing basic needs falls largely on the shoulders of women within Barbadian society.²⁵⁹ This burden becomes especially heavy in times of economic hardship when finding the money for school clothes, medicines, and basic food stuffs becomes difficult. This difficulty is exacerbated in a society which historically condones the practice of men having several families, promotes the idea that women should be economically dependent on these men, and rarely provides the kinds of income-generating opportunities that would allow such men to financially support numerous families.

In order to make ends meet in such situations "strong" women become "miracle workers." Eudine Barriteau describes the ramifications of such a stereotype:

This myth of the miracle worker obscures how gender relations are constructed to exploit the capacity of women to cope. These ideas posit that Caribbean women have some inherent, natural capacity for survival. By doing so, they conceal how the state counts on women to fill the gaps when changes in macroeconomic policy, whether introduced by structural adjustment programs or the effects of globalization produce a severely reduced public sector and the further rationing of economic resources (Elson 1991).²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 121-50.

²⁵⁷ Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels*, 109.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁵⁹ I recognize that this is a very general statement. The ways in which family structures are changing and especially the changing role of the father will be explored more in chapter four, pages 118-119.

²⁶⁰ Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 122.

In such situations, Barbadian women often rely on alternative market structures, and develop multiple income generating skills. It is not uncommon for women to bake or take in sewing to augment their incomes. They may also rely on their own attractiveness to attract men who are willing to provide financial assistance to them and their families. Such liaisons are rarely viewed as prostitution, but more so as women using their sexuality as they would any other resource in order to meet their basic needs and the needs of those who depend upon them.

Such resourcefulness has colored the stereotype of the “strong” Barbadian woman. Many of these stereotypes spring from a common misreading of female power. The image of Barbadian women as hard, sexually conniving, and too independent, I would argue is tied to what Audre Lorde presents as the misrepresentation of the erotic. Lorde explains how the erotic is often misunderstood and/or misrepresented as pornographic, and the ways in which women are taught to distrust their own erotic power.²⁶¹ Such a misunderstanding is evident in stereotypes of Barbadian women. What is sensual and empowering about Barbadian womanhood is often misunderstood as sexually irresponsible and controlling, just as the ability to cope and adjust to changing circumstances is misunderstood as some sort of superwoman strength.

Barbadian women, in negotiating disparate definitions of womanhood, have had to call on the erotic, on a sense of inner power, as a means of survival. Their definitions of self have existed outside of as much as within the dominant or official social structures throughout the centuries of Barbadian history. The nationalist movement, in redefining a national identity which was tied to but different from a colonial identity, inspired new identity constructions. This moment was furthered by the international women’s movements, especially those efforts of women of color. Post-independence definitions of Barbadian femininity rely on a more outward performance of the erotic while still maintaining a base in the struggle between earlier disparate definitions of womanhood. In her study *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, Edna Brodber notes how “It would seem from post-Independence newspaper reports that Barbadian women began to articulate their view of right behavior for women only with the onslaught of the women’s liberation movement on the northern continent. This peaked with the UN declaration of a year for women” in 1975.²⁶² The feminist movement that happened on the heels of many national struggles and began a focus on women of color internationally gave Barbadian women the tools with which to articulate the erotic power that they had been practicing for centuries.

If the nationalist movement allowed Barbados to redefine itself as a nation-state, the subsequent international feminist movement allowed Barbadian women a wide support base through which they could redefine their positions within Barbados. The structure of the Barbadian nation-state followed suit and only a year after the UN’s International Year of the Woman the Barbadian government formed the Women’s Bureau becoming one of the first Caribbean governments to address women’s issues at a national level in 1976. Women also took advantage of the social policies of the independent government, namely free health care and free education. Education in particular became a contested site as the numbers of women reaching and finishing university began to surpass those of men. Such a phenomenon was predicated both on the social policy of free education and the social ideology of gender. While education was seen as an important avenue of uplift for all, Barbadian girls were socialized to sit still inside (an environment conducive to studying), while boys were socialized to be outside and active. This is

²⁶¹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 54.

²⁶² Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, 15.

only one example of the ways in which preliminary efforts to address women's issues coupled with older social expectations served to create new stereotypes.

While Barbadian women have been actively redefining their own public images for centuries and those efforts have been welcomed to a degree post-1975, such efforts have also been widely criticized. As women began taking advantage of new social policies, the idea that they, and any government efforts that have supported them, were taking resources and attention away from men became a popular sentiment.²⁶³ The rise in women's civic organizations paralleled the subsequent rise of men's organizations. Barriteau notes that "Barbados, of all Anglophone Caribbean countries has an organized men's network with a strident anti-feminist, anti-women agenda."²⁶⁴ While she supports the idea of critically engaging gender as a whole and studying and supporting femininity and masculinity, she is wary of what she terms the "anti-woman focus" of many of the men's groups of the last few decades. Such groups act on the presumption that "the Barbadian state has conceded too much to women."²⁶⁵

The gendered discourses that were key to much of the literature of the independence moment moved into different arenas post-independence. With the rise of radio and later television, as well as the state's revival of Crop Over in 1974, music became more and more central to popular culture. While the voices of the 1970s and 1980s were largely male, a few female performers began to chart a path in calypso, spouge, and later soca.²⁶⁶ By the twenty-first century, even with backlash against the state's perceived favoritism of women, these women's voices have become central to defining "woman power" within Barbadian society.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have produced multiple arenas of representation within the mass media market. As Erna Brodber notes "today's image-makers have at their disposal more powerful instruments of persuasion than did those of the pre-independence era. A crippling mystique of femininity today pervades our society through the agency of the mass media, affecting the self-image and the aspirations of hundreds of thousands of Caribbean women."²⁶⁷ Entering into the twenty-first century Barbadian femininity has a rich history of identity constructions, and in the hyperreal technological moment, even more influences to incorporate and negotiate.²⁶⁸

Even in 2000, anthropologist Carla Freeman finds that "women in Barbados are simultaneously revered, as mothers and providers, and ridiculed, as mercenary, manipulative sexual partners."²⁶⁹ The difference in treatment hinges on notions of respect. In my own experience with Barbadians including family, friends, strangers, and interviewees, I have found that to be respected is to be treated as (and at times explicitly referred to as) a queen.²⁷⁰ The trope of the queen allows women a public image that is educated, sexual, fun, powerful, and non-threatening in the way that Ula Taylor defines as community feminist. This queen is a woman

²⁶³ Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 13.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ These performers will be discussed in more detail on page 74.

²⁶⁷ Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, xiii.

²⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1. Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as a space of over-representation, a series of models without an original reality. This point is considered more in chapter six.

²⁶⁹ Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels*, 59.

²⁷⁰ It is not uncommon for strangers to address women as queens when saying good morning or passing on the streets. Contemporary musicians also refer to Barbadian women as queens as in Coalishun's 1996 song "Ice Cream": "This is Coalishun, respect to all of the queen."

who navigates a space that marries feminism and nationalism by uplifting entire communities and empowering women even within “traditional” female roles of mother and provider.

We see the queen discourse most notably in the image of musicians. Celebrations of International Women’s Day and Mother’s Day feature various performers, officials, and supporters who believe, as Barbadian female singer TC put it in her performance at an International Women’s Day event in 2010, that “We are the future, We are the hope/To fight the crime, the drugs, the dope/To teach our children how to cope/In this new millennium.”²⁷¹ It is worthy of noting that although here, as in many of her songs, TC places herself within the “we” who are the hope and future of the nation in tending to children, and generally performing somewhat stereotypical roles of support, she herself is an open lesbian and thus in many ways falls outside of heteronormative assumptions of womanhood. Her lyrical content here is an example of what Hilary Beckles among others calls community mothering. Her command of the stage as Queen of Social Commentary is an example of Taylor’s community feminism wherein the health of the nation is supported by women in non-traditional roles.

In the twenty-first century Barbadian women find themselves the targets of old structures of power relations and new critiques of favoritism while negotiating between the images of who they are, who they should be, and who they know themselves to be. They continue to “mother” the nation with their strength and ability to cope marking them as “real-real Bajan” women, dodging notions of themselves as “*this woman*,” and still searching for ways to express and celebrate a female sensuality such that their erotic power is not too threatening or dangerous to patriarchal structures. One telling example of this negotiation to construct an identifiable yet liberating Barbadian femininity is the career of popular performer Alison Hinds.

QUEEN ALISON: CROWNING MOMENTS AND DIFFERENT THRONES

Alison Hinds, a true **Caribbean Queen**, came to the throne thru SOCA (popular dance music of the Southern Caribbean) that is rapidly gaining popularity among music lovers around the globe. It is a sexy music known for its infectious rhythms and spirited spicy lyrics that inspires jubilant audience participation albeit with waving hands and flags to swaying hips, all in a ritualistic celebration that exemplifies life today in the Caribbean and is synonymous with Caribbean Carnival celebrations worldwide.²⁷²

The above statement begins Alison Hinds’s biography on her fan page www.alisonhinds.com. The writer is careful to invoke the trope of royalty and to rely on depictions of the Caribbean and its culture as sexy, infectious, and ritualistic before actually delving into exactly who Alison Hinds is. Alison Hinds came into the local public eye when she joined the popular band Square One at the tender age of sixteen. Born in England, an eleven-year old Hinds moved to Barbados with her mother when her parents split up. A shy young girl, Alison was encouraged to perform in order to assert herself and competed in the Richard Stoute Teen Talent Competition. Within Square One, Anderson Armstrong (a.k.a. Young Blood, a.k.a. Blood) had an immense impact on her early career, as well as Terry (the Mexican Pan Man) Arthur. Square One’s music and popularity took off throughout the early to mid 1990s and

²⁷¹ Bynoe, Kenmore. “Women’s Day Celebration.” *Nation News*.

²⁷² www.alisonhinds.com/biography, accessed May 9, 2010.

Alison moved from being a voice in the back to one of the foremost leads in the band. They toured the hotel circuit and performed in various genres such as R&B, soca, and reggae. Touring with Square One took Hinds to shores around the world including Sweden and Suriname, but the name of Alison Hinds would take on new meaning when she entered into competition in Trinidad with John King. Their collaboration entitled “Hold You in A Song,” won the 1992 Barbados Song Contest. The song’s message of love and the fact that its performance lacked the party aesthetics of many of Square One’s more popular songs, appealed to both young and old audiences who could focus on Hinds’s voice and skillful delivery. Its slow melodies and sentimental message endeared Alison to a larger Caribbean crowd and foreshadowed many collaborations with Caribbean male artists.

Hinds has traversed the different standards of femininity that have emerged throughout Barbados’s history, those based on colonial ideologies of the “English lady,” and a diasporically informed black femininity. Throughout the years her fans and the media wholeheartedly supported her dubbing her the Queen of Soca music.²⁷³ Alison Hinds reluctantly accepted the title of Queen, understanding that her fans were asking her to represent them and the duties and pressures that such representation would entail. This section will explore the various uses of the queen trope, how Alison Hinds earned her reputation as “a true Caribbean Queen,” and the ways in which Hinds uses it to declare her position as a representative of Barbadian and Caribbean culture.

Unlike Rachael Pringle Polgreen, an archive of Alison Hinds’s public image includes a plethora of visual materials. Throughout the years Alison Hinds has constructed a public image that both she and her fans are comfortable with. Hinds is unapologetically middle-class, but heralds and forwards Barbadian and Caribbean folk traditions (usually associated with the lower classes) over and above European and North American standards of culture.²⁷⁴ After beginning her performance career with Square One Hinds became the first woman to win the performance titles of Road Monarch and Party Monarch in the 1990s, and her appeal quickly grew throughout the Caribbean region.²⁷⁵ In the early 2000s she took time off from performing to spend time with her family, eventually embarking upon a solo career. Her public image has grown more complex with time, including the various roles that Barbadian women play, such as mother, wife, economic and emotional pillar, as well as entertainer and cultural icon. In 2000, she was declaring that her sexiness was not in excess and that she was an entertainer not a babysitter for

²⁷³ Soca music is indigenous to the Eastern Caribbean.

²⁷⁴ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 90. For a more in depth discussion of class, Caribbean culture, and Alison Hinds see Springer, “Roll It Gal.”

²⁷⁵ In 1996 Alison Hinds became the first woman to win the title of Road Monarch in Barbados’ Crop Over Festival with the song “Ragamuffin.” Within the next year she had also taken the title of Party Monarch with her song “In the Meantime” (1997). The titles Road Monarch and Party Monarch are won in competition at Barbados’s annual Carnival, Crop Over. Road Monarch is given to the singer of the most played song on the road during the road march called Kadooment. The Party Monarch competition is for the best party song of the Crop Over season. (See chapter two for more information.) Coming after years of consistent musical success, these titles cemented her audience’s appreciation and redirected the history of the Crop Over competitions. Hinds was the first woman to win both the Party Monarch title and the Road Monarch title (spliffietv. “Alison Hinds interview – Pt. 2.”). In 1986 Lady Ann was the first woman to make it to the Pic-o-de Crop finals. Rita Forrester was the first to win a Pic-o-de-Crop title in 1988. These early pioneers opened the door for artists like TC (the Queen of social commentary), Natahlee (Ragga Soca Queen) and Alison Hinds (Soca Queen of the region) who all began competing in the 1990s. Alison’s titles in 1996 and 1997 built on a history of female entertainers and cemented the role of women in the Barbados’ Crop Over competitions. (Harris, “DIVAS,” 23-27. NCF archives)

everyone's children.²⁷⁶ By 2009, she opened her Alison's Wonderland show with a video montage which ended with a heartfelt message that she wanted her daughter to watch her shows and be proud. Hinds's current public image is centered on responsibility—to her immediate family, to the nation she calls home, to the Caribbean region, and most especially to the women within it.

The trope of queen can be found throughout black popular music and the African diaspora as a whole. Sonjah Stanley Niaah explains how “The idea of the queen reveals the consistently elevated place of women as key counterparts of kings, formal or informal, named or unnamed. The pervasive elevation of a central female persona is consistent with African popular and sacred traditions.”²⁷⁷ Within black popular culture the queen trope has been used as a means of gaining and demanding respect, while asserting oneself as worthy of it. Within the black U.S. context, specifically, one can easily point to such titles as the Queen of Soul held by Aretha Franklin (who demanded R.E.S.P.E.C.T. by taking an Otis Redding song and turning it into a women's anthem), the Queen of R&B held by Mary J. Blige, as well as other iterations of the trope such as Queen Latifah, Queen Pen, and Lil' Kim who is also known as Queen Bee.

As a songstress and emcee emerging fairly early in hip hop history, Queen Latifah's image was able to marry a sense of “soft” femininity with “hard” respect-demanding bravado early in her career. She commands respect through the posture of royalty (the trope of the Queen) and she demands respect lyrically for herself and all women. Kamari Clarke explains how Latifah entered the limelight “with a message of African nobility and urban American pride. Queen Latifah incorporated the themes of black pride from the earlier decade; however, her music was a response to American racism and the female derogation that was marketed by the largest recording industries in the United States.”²⁷⁸ Some of her most popular songs and videos such as “U.N.I.T.Y” and “Just Another Day” display this dual balance between black pride in an urban setting and resistance to female derogation on the one hand, and the personal performance of “soft” femininity and “hardness” on the other.

In 1993 Queen Latifah released the video for “Just Another Day,” a song from her *Black Reign* album. The video is shot in black and white evoking a nostalgic aesthetic. The chorus is a slow melody displaying Queen Latifah's gentle songstress voice, while the lyrics to the verses display her willingness to use violence when necessary, the circumstances in which it would be necessary, and her and her community's “hardness.” Latifah's delivery of the verses is punctuated with accents while still playful at times. Her movement throughout the video mirrors the content of the song. Queen Latifah dances slowly, her hands moving gently across the screen when singing the chorus. When delivering the verses her movement is much more animated. Her body rocks with the crowd. At times her delivery is accented by her hands or a sudden stop in her movement. Notably in her third verse, she respectfully admits that without her community there would be “No reason to put Queen in front of the name Latifah.” Within this song she posits herself as a representation of the community that has shaped her. She is worthy of her title because of her lyrical skill, her knowledge and understanding of her community, and the support of that community.

Queen Latifah's acknowledgement of her community demonstrates the ways in which the title of queen is earned. It derives from both an inner erotic power, knowing that one is capable

²⁷⁶ Wayne, “Celebrity Focus: Alison Hines,” 24.

²⁷⁷ Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall*, 138.

²⁷⁸ Clarke, *Mapping Yoruba Networks*, 151.

and worthy of royal status and responsibilities, and the acknowledgement and respect of such power bestowed by a collective community. Diasporically, this title serves to represent local and specific identities to larger audiences. Alison Hinds draws on this representative, community-oriented performance of the queen trope as well as more specifically Caribbean iterations of queenliness in order to translate her personal visibility as an artist into more critical attention for the Barbadian nation, the Caribbean region and the women within it.

Some of the most well-known Caribbean performances of the queen trope happen within Jamaican dancehall. The performance, competitions, and 1999 film *Dancehall Queen* has solidified the trope within the Jamaican context. Jamaican Dancehall queens are both celebrated and vilified, but their status remains distinctly tied to the visibility of their bodies. The controversy around the figure of the dancehall queen stems from a distinct sense of visibility. Dancehall queens are recognizable through their dress and movement. Within the dancehalls, the highly suggestive movement of these women's scantily clad bodies is a celebratory resistance to Jamaican middle class structures of morality, modesty, decency, and respectability. For women who do not have the resources (and perhaps not the interest) in being a part of the respectable middle-class, the trope of dancehall queen is one means of forcefully establishing one's existence, of saying "I am not what you want me to be, but I am still here and I am still valid." While dancehall queens first gained celebrity status in their communities in the 1970s, throughout the 1990s reigning dancehall queens Carlene and Stacey "contributed the most to the rise of the image, style and appeal of such queens of dancehall, who are expected to demonstrate certain attributes of attitude and style as well as dancing skill."²⁷⁹ The resistance to middle-class values is both proved and troubled by queens such as Carlene, who as a lighter-skinned woman of middle-class background, reigned throughout the late 1990s. The idea that a woman of her status would willingly "debase" herself was troublesome to many, but her status opened new doors for the throne as she was featured in tourism advertisements and other arenas that were previously seen as too respectable for the dancehall.²⁸⁰ Such attention reached its height in the top grossing Jamaican film *Dancehall Queen*.

As demonstrated in the 1999 film *Dancehall Queen*, distinguishing oneself visually is crucial to attaining the throne within dancehall culture. In the film, the protagonist, a working class single mother named Marcia, finds power in redefining herself as the Mystery Lady of the dancehall. Marcia's adoption of the Mystery Lady persona is spawned by economic need and inspired by her oldest daughter's self-confidence. Marcia can only embark on her journey toward Dancehall Queen with the help of a skilled dressmaker who creates her sexy and outrageous outfits complete with colored wigs, fake nails, and plenty of jewelry. Along the path to the throne of Dancehall Queen, the Mystery Lady is also aided by the dancehall photographer whose attention is essential to the title. As the Mystery Lady, Marcia reveals herself physically through her attire while concealing her identity in an act of dissemblance. She discovers her sexual/sensual appeal as a site of power and uses it to demobilize threats to her family, to seek revenge against her daughter's rapist, and ultimately to discover her own erotic power. Such a performance of queenliness skirts the line between the erotic and pornographic in its visual representation. Visually Marcia (and other dancehall queens) can easily be interpreted as performing a pornographic role, one in which they are consumed by a voyeuristic audience focusing on their scantily clad bodies and their mastery of movement. Such an interpretation,

²⁷⁹ Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall*, 138.

²⁸⁰ See Edmondson, "Public Spectacles"; Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall*; Stolzoff, *Wake the Town*.

however, disregards the erotic power of dancehall queens who find inner strength, monetary reward, self-confidence, and respect through performing the role.

While Alison Hinds represents Barbados she does so within a particular paradigm, using the tools that she has, and the most striking of which is the embodiment of a distinctly Barbadian femininity. More than the historical use of the queen trope in various traditions of black music and the traditional monarchical notion of the queen, Hinds draws on the local quotidian performances of the Queen trope practiced in Barbados. Hinds is able to do so because of a host of female performers who paved the way for her.

Wendy Alleyne can be considered the forerunner of Barbadian female singers. Named by her fans as Barbados's "Queen of Song,"²⁸¹ she sang back-up vocals to the Drayton's Two in the midst of Spouge's popularity, and became famous as "Wendy Alleyne and the Sweet Sensations."²⁸² Performing in the 1970s, her sound resounded in a chorus of nationhood, feminine power, and her own individuality. In the midst of local and worldwide feminist movements, though her voice was heralded at the time, her popularity also inevitably butted up against still prevalent notions that a woman's place was not in the public sphere. In explaining how male artists would only accept so much female success Alleyne says: "I didn't care about them saying that, 'cause I knew what I wanted from [the time I was] a child ... I wasn't gonna let anybody stop me,... that's not me. I'm a fighter."²⁸³ Alleyne's success led her to tour throughout the Caribbean spreading the name of Barbados, and an image of Barbadian women, far beyond the island's borders. But it wasn't until 2009 that she received official acknowledgement for her contributions to the nation when she performed on November 30 at Frank Collymore Hall as part of a celebration of Barbados's forty-third independence day. Online comments about the show sang her praises, but some lamented the fact that her legacy has not been as well kept as many who remember her would like. One commenter had this to say:

How come Wendy has not been given her due? We speak of Rhianna [sic] but I am sure there are those who would agree that were it not for Wendy Some people would not have [known] a thing about Barbados... Wendy I love ya!!!!²⁸⁴

Wendy Alleyne's success in the 1970s, on and off of the island, paved the way for a number of female performers after her, one of the more notable ones being Lady Ann who was the first woman to enter the Pic O de Crop finals in 1984. In the 1990s Lady Ann migrated to Boston, Massachusetts "looking for greener pastures," where she worked as a nursing assistant before starting her own entertainment business.²⁸⁵ She still performs, often in small venues where she can introduce her audiences to Caribbean music. Lady Ann is glad to see more women performing in Barbados, but "she believes they still have some ways to go in gaining the respect they deserve."²⁸⁶ Both Alleyne and Lady Ann found that their most lasting success, and ultimately their legacies, would be best preserved by going overseas. Their stories display the ways in which both Barbadian cultural forms and cultural representations are reliant on the migrations of Barbadian people, and how women performers can achieve the respect of a queen

²⁸¹ saxeous, "Wendy Alleyne."

²⁸² Ibid. Spouge is a music form indigenous to Barbados. See chapter two, pages 38-39, for more details.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ "Wendy Alleyne Show."

²⁸⁵ Rollock, "Lady Ann Born to Sing."

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

by representing the nation abroad. Alison Hinds's international performance schedule and the broad reach of her music reiterates her queenliness in similar ways.

In 2005, the song "Roll it Gal" catapulted Alison Hinds into international success. Within two years it had entered into the regular rotation of DJs playing Caribbean music worldwide, and had been picked up by most major cell phone carriers as a ringtone. "Roll it Gal" features the kind of "woman power" lyrics that Alison Hinds had already displayed with earlier hits such as "Confidence" and "Ladies Rule." The lyrics speak of women's independence, strength, confidence, and above all else control. The chorus "roll it gal, control it gal," encourages women to roll their hips, while the verses implore women to take pride in their non-physical assets, and to protect and be proud of their bodies. With lines such as "Go to school gal, and get yuh degree/ Nurture and take care of yuh pickney/ Gal yuh work hard to make yuh money," such control and pride is founded on education, motherhood, and economic survival; but overall "Roll it Gal" sends the same message that Hinds has given directly to her fans throughout the years: "Ladies, let's support and love one another!"²⁸⁷

Hinds is known for her performances, her body, and her movement. She has perfected what is known as the Caribbean *wine*, a dance in which one circles or "rolls" the hips and backside to the rhythm. "Roll it Gal" solidified the connection between Hinds's role as a Caribbean Queen and the movements that she has built her career around. *Rooollllllll, roll it gal, roll it gal. Rooollllllll, control it gal, roll it gal.* The words meld into the rhythm forcing hips to wind around themselves, calling on a powerful Afro-Caribbean tradition. By rolling, wining, or otherwise *wukking* her hips, any "gal" is able to display an isolated control of her movement, direct any attention her body has attracted, and by circling this particular section of anatomy—where the body's center of gravity resides—she commands and manipulates the degree of attraction to everything and everyone within her gravitational pull; she begins to master her very relation to the physical world. The call to "roll it gal, control it gal" is a specifically female invitation to display such power. It is a call that both exhibits Afro-Caribbean culture and invites any woman or girl who hears it to find power within the movement.

This movement is central to Hinds's performance of her Caribbean identity. The speed and control she is able to execute within her wine marks her as specifically Barbadian, wining as part of the national dance of "wukking up." Hinds's audience has come to know her as a woman in control and the centrality of wining to her performance is but one manifestation of her authority over her body, her image, and her performance sphere. Manipulating her center of gravity, she attracts attention while the subtle nuances of her movements direct it. Feet firmly planted, often in stilettos, she stands her ground challenging her audience to view her through the lens she chooses. Alison Hinds is a wining woman whose movement and lyrics tell the history of Caribbean women's power in relation to the world around them. In doing so, "she challenges the objectification of the female body and demands a celebration of female sexuality," and she voices her celebration of this movement as a celebration of blackness.²⁸⁸ The song "Roll it Gal" encourages women in the dance while promoting "woman power," both in the celebration of the female body and in the lyrics which promote education, health, and self-respect. The two attitudes of ancestral blackness and celebration of the body ultimately shape the ways in which

²⁸⁷ Alison Hinds's facebook page, accessed March 8, 2010 (International Women's Day), <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Alison-Hinds/39601973164?fref=ts>.

²⁸⁸ Springer, "Roll it Gal," 103-04; The Caribbean wine has strong connections to Congolese dance forms.

Alison Hinds has constructed her solo career as a queen—a powerful woman in a cultural domain maintaining, representing, and expanding a gendered, national, and regional identity.

The erotic power that Alison Hinds exudes is tied to her own ideas of race, African ancestry, and Barbados as a black nation. In response to a critique of her sensual performances Hinds had this to say in a 2000 interview:

It's the same in Barbados. It's almost as if people are ashamed to do what for us comes so naturally. The grinding and the gyrating is within us, it's in our genes. We were not taught it. We don't have to be taught how to do it. When the music starts, we do what comes naturally. I feel sorry for those people who are not comfortable with being who they are, with being black, with what coming from Africa is all about. What are we expected to do? Stifle this thing that's within us until we finally choke on it? The wining must never stop! Carnival means time to let go, to let it all hang out. Time for breaking out of all those chains, placed on us by people who really don't know themselves. Our cultural safety valve!²⁸⁹

Hinds's response is very much in line with Audre Lorde's sense of the erotic. Lorde notes how "We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence."²⁹⁰ Alison Hinds decries the ways in which the power of the physical body and inner female strength are denigrated in society. But she also racializes this critique by tying the physical-psychic power to an ancestral blackness. Her own performances (and her defense of them) marry sensuality with "Africanness," and celebrate movement and an awareness of it as part of a healthy sense of one's physicality and one's identity as a Barbadian.

The interview quoted above took place in 2000 when Alison Hinds was still quite young and in that stage of youth that is more often than not sexualized in its public representations, yet she was old enough and experienced enough for reflection and a critical response to critique. As a *young* woman her body and its movement was an asset to her publicity, but as an *adult* woman she was able to articulate her own views of its reception. This is a quality that has come to shape Hinds's image over the past ten years. Her music retains a very youthful vibe while she refines and expands it to greater audiences; and with larger audiences and greater attention she has had more opportunities to voice her own opinions about what her music means to her and her own visions of what it can do for others.

As she began to reach out to broader audiences throughout the Caribbean and the world Alison Hinds thought it would be appropriate to call on her status as queen in promoting her first solo CD in 2007. In explaining the title of the album, *Soca Queen*, she says that in reaching out to a mainstream market she wanted everyone to know that soca music is "a force to be reckoned with."²⁹¹ Those first encountering the genre through her music would be meeting the queen.

²⁸⁹ Wayne, "Celebrity Focus: Alison Hines," 25. For further analysis of the relationship between movement and identity see Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence* and Sloat, *Caribbean Dance*.

²⁹⁰ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 53.

²⁹¹ spliffietv, "Alison Hinds interview – Pt. 2."

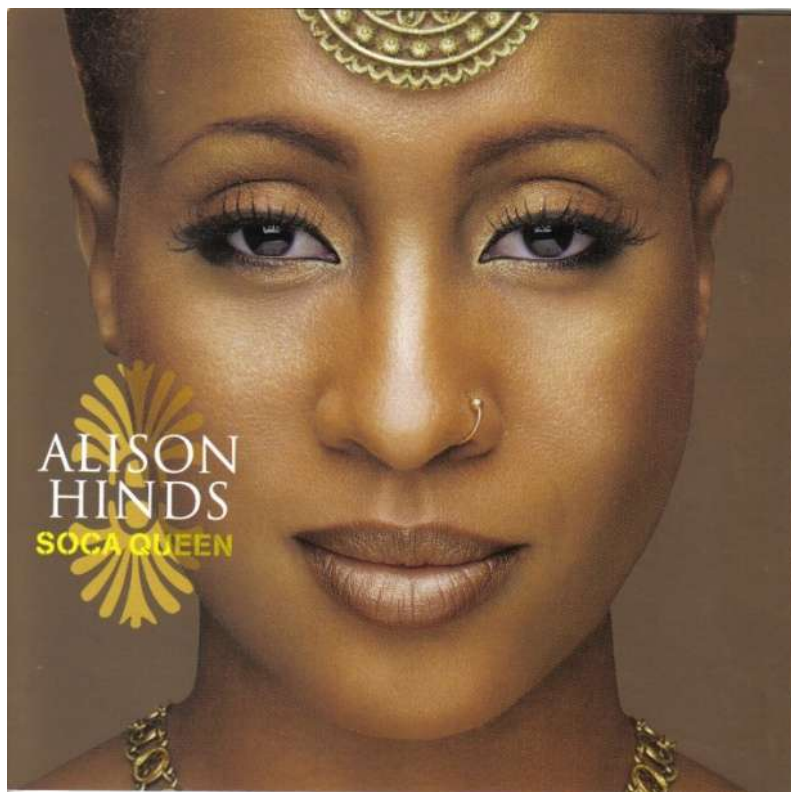


Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

Such an attitude is reflected in the album's packaging. Buyers are met with a close up of Alison Hinds's caramel-skinned face, carefully made up and lighted to effect a slight glow on the front cover of *Soca Queen*. Her countenance is that of a slight knowing smile, both inviting and secretive. Her jewelry is golden, simple, and largely on the margins of image. Framing her face are a barely visible gold link necklace and a similar round gold pattern lays just barely in the frame on her forehead. Her eyes look out over a small nose ring. The album cover is entirely in soft earth tones with a hint of yellow in the title. The title of the album is quite small and almost overshadowed by the artist's name just to the left of the face. Although she invokes her role as queen in the title of the album, Hinds's royal status is most evident in the visual image she portrays on its cover.

The back cover continues the trend with slight differences. This image of the queen is in profile, her gaze looking forward and no longer at the audience, while the shape of her head outlines the song list. With her red-tinted dreadlocks wrapped in a Nefertiti style crown Hinds has lost the head piece featured on the front cover. The profile also includes the added feature of long dangling circular earrings which fall just inches over her bare shoulders. The evocation of popular depictions of Nefertiti connects Hinds to a mythical African past, rooting her royal status in the image of an established and recognizable black monarch.²⁹² The juxtaposition of these images, front and profile, is also strangely reminiscent of nineteenth century ethnographic profiles and twentieth century responses to these profiles.²⁹³

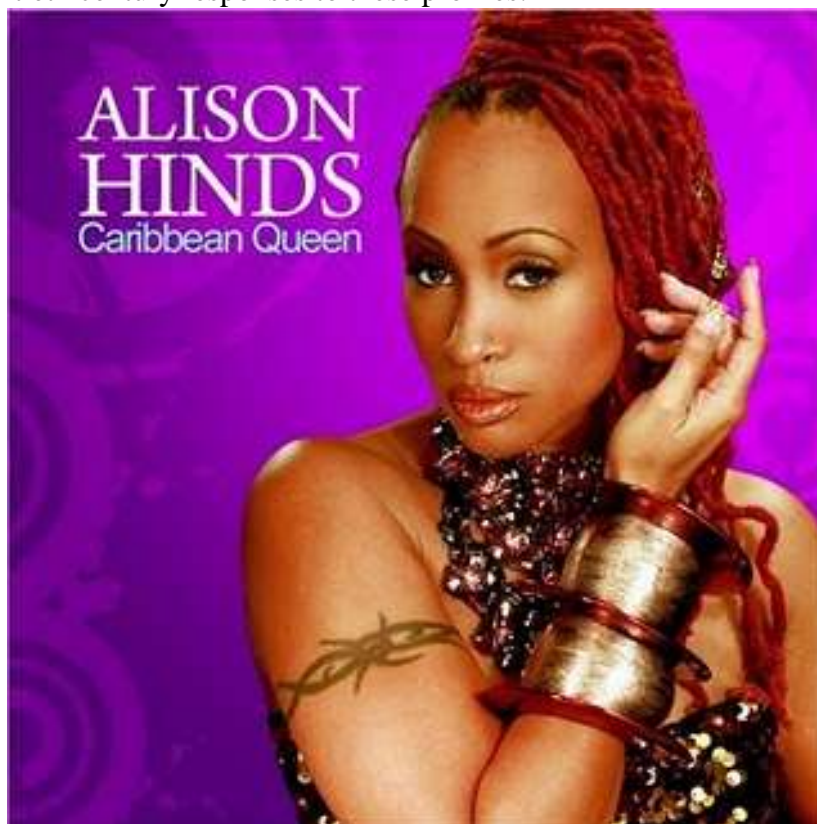


Figure 3.4

²⁹² For a lengthier discussion of the significance of images of Egypt in early iterations of African diasporic consciousness see Painter, *Creating Black Americans* and Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*.

²⁹³ For a more in depth discussion see Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*.

Her second solo album, *Caribbean Queen*, invokes similar aesthetics. She loses the earth tones in favor of a royal purple background. Again, her name far outshines the title of the album whose content is consciously pan-Caribbean in musical stylings and subject matter. Her face still betrays a mysterious invitation found mostly in the direct gaze of her eyes and the slight profile of her head. The tribal patterned tattoo on her right arm is just as prominent as the jewelry which is much heavier than that of the previous album cover. Her hair is upswept invoking the same crown-like effect while a few curled locks are allowed to fall framing her face and resting on her, once again, bare shoulders.

These album covers portray a woman aware of her audience and in control of her space. Hinds is looking at the viewer as she is being looked at. Her gaze suggests a power over consumers just as she is being consumed by them. The covers suggest such a power through hints of sensuality (her bare shoulders, the faint smile, an inviting glance) that are held in check by the posturing of an African queen.

Hinds's performance as a queen celebrates her African heritage, but it is not (or at least not only) an Afrocentric celebration employed in the service of black nationalist and/or black feminist empowerment. Hinds uses the trope of the black queen as a strategic tool of diasporic identification crossing class, nationality, and differing politics of respectability. It is a statement of power, admittedly limited, yet potent in its accessibility.

REFINING RESPECTABILITY: JAMMETTE AS QUEEN

We obsessed with this
 Don't mess with this
 Don't test with this
 Is de best with this
 Ehhhhh
 You wha yuh lookin at
 You never see a crew that can wine like dat
 Never met a girl that can wine down flat
 Never see a batty cock up so

 We does do this for a living
 Is a art dat we perfect
 And is free lessons we givin
 Focus and don't break yuh neck²⁹⁴

Alison Hinds's solo career is based on the trope of queen enacted with an African-inspired aesthetic but also rooted in the history of public representations of women in Barbados and throughout the Caribbean. Belinda Edmondson notes that while historically "respectable" classes in the Caribbean looked down upon (black) women performing in public, such a view "has been turned on its head in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries as modernity and cultural progress have been linked to respectable women moving into the public sphere."²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Hinds, Garcia, Belfon, "Obsessive Winers."

²⁹⁵ Edmondson, "Public Spectacles," 2.

Alison Hinds and many of her female contemporaries have redefined the parameters of respectability to include the kind of sensuality that is oft-credited to an African heritage and/or fought for through the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Hinds's reputation is largely built on this redefinition. These new parameters then incorporate historical elements and transform them within post-independence identity constructions. Through Hinds's performances the movements, attitudes, sensuality, and cultural performances that once marked a woman as low-class and of ill-repute have become the signs of a culturally competent respectable Caribbean Queen. Such a transformation is apparent in the different historical readings of the term *jammette*.

Nineteenth century Caribbean populations used the term *jammette* to denote a particular type of woman present in the public eye. Maude Dikobe explains: "Originally, the term 'jammette' referred to a prostitute, but in current usage it has become somewhat more generalized to refer to a woman who engages in unapologetic sexual activity. It derives from the French term *diameter*, specifically 'below the level (diametre) of respectability.'" ²⁹⁶ Dikobe goes on to trace the ways in which the *jammette* can be interpreted as a postcolonial expression: "today the jammette image is 'honored' and perceived in a new and powerful light by some men and women who see it as a way to celebrate both African culture, and the rebellious role of Carnival as a form of resisting cultural and political oppression." ²⁹⁷ After independence, many of the practices that colonialism deemed inappropriate, lewd, and otherwise not respectable began to be viewed through the lens of African heritage celebrated in distinctly Caribbean ways. The use of the hips, and mid-section in particular became central to an unapologetic performance of Caribbeanness. I use the trope of the *jammette* here as a tool to show the varied performances of the erotic in the specific history of the Caribbean.

The post-independence reclamation of the *jammette* celebrates what colonialism denigrated. It allows women to publicly celebrate their bodies, to display their own erotic power, and to exert control over the spaces in which they perform their femininity, ultimately redefining public standards of respectability. Even within such reclamations, not all *jammettes* are viewed in the same light. Especially since the reclamation of the term, various interpretations of the *jammette* trope have come to light in the performances of female artists throughout the Caribbean. An analysis of three performers in the English-speaking Eastern Caribbean—Destra Garcia, Denise "Saucy" Belfon, and Alison Hinds—demonstrates the variety of interpretations. Each performer is publicly sexual and sensual in ways that, by nineteenth century standards, would earn them the title of *jammette*, yet each woman celebrates her body in her own unique way providing three varied though related performances of the *jammette* trope. An analysis of the 2009 Soca Monarch performance of "Obsessive Winers" in Trinidad further illustrates this point. ²⁹⁸ The performance of this song demonstrates the individuality of each performer as well as the collective "woman power" that is central to performances of Caribbean femininity.

"Obsessive Winers" is a song which demonstrates different performances of Caribbean tropes of femininity, the autoerotic power of Caribbean women within popular culture, and the collective realization of that power. The performers—Destra Garcia of Trinidad, Denise "Saucy" Belfon also from Trinidad, and Barbadian Alison Hinds—all enact a different performance of the *jammette* trope while engaging in a discourse of "woman power" as they entertain their audience.

²⁹⁶ Dikobe, "Doing She Own Thing," 11.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 151.

²⁹⁸ Bailey, "Destra Denise and Alison."

The lyrics to the chorus demonstrate the exceptionality of these women (as performers or as Caribbean women, it is not made clear), and the male vocal behind their voices underscores the point with a low toned “you’re obsessed with this. You can’t mess with this.” Even as the women work collectively, it is Alison Hinds whom both the audience and the performers are most obsessed with.

Hinds earned her titles of Soca Queen and Caribbean Queen through a repertoire filled with songs about wining, and the language of movement in the Caribbean. Songs such as “Confidence,” “Wukkin Crazy,” and “Brace and Wine” all engage wining as a means to signify Caribbean culture, embody female power, and relate these things to wider audiences. In the 2009 Soca Monarch performance of “Obsessive Winers,” each performer has her own style, but they all use a movement that has specific significance to the Caribbean, the wine, in order to demonstrate the power of the erotic within the Caribbean context. This particular performance of the song occurs in front of a Caribbean audience that is both versed in and participating in one of the most salient expressions of Caribbean culture, Carnival.

First to display her “Obsessive Wine” on the stage is Destra Garcia. Clad in a blue, tight, and very short dress she turns her back to the audience in order to better display the movement of her hips and backside. She wears silver boots, colored highlights in her hair, a wide belt displaying a “coke bottle” figure, silver bracelets, and noticeably long nails. Destra’s carefully manicured appearance is one example of the ways in which “looks, costume, and a slim body are becoming part of a marketing strategy for soca that one cannot ignore.”²⁹⁹ As she moves her dress slowly rises and when her verse is through the other performers come in with the chorus as Destra declares “is de dress, is de dress.” Destra’s performance here is one of a new-age respectable *jammette*. While her sexy and revealing costuming is an essential part of her marketing as a performer in that “Destra inhabits a conventional niche as a sex symbol – one associated with comfortable European pop icons of beauty,” it also limits her movement (however slightly).³⁰⁰ In declaring “is de dress, is de dress” she gives a slight apology for the fact that she is not willing to go to the level where she is completely exposed, and because of this she is not able to execute the movement as fully as she would like within the moment. She is firmly within the public eye, but still apologetic.

The next performer to display her skill is “big bottom Alison Hinds.”³⁰¹ Dressed in a sleeveless black and purple top with a high sheer collar that shows just a hint of midriff, tight black pants, and what look to be four inch purple stilletos, Alison Hinds takes center stage. After a brief interaction with the audience, Hinds identifies herself as “Trinbajan” identifying with both her Trinidadian audience and the island she calls home before stating that she has come to *represent* and asking the audience if they are ready. As she turns around she and her fellow performers turn their attention to the big screen behind them as both Belfon and Garcia continue to comment on how big Hinds’s “bumsy” is. As she begins to move slowly there is slow roar of astonishment from the crowd which grows as the pace of her movement quickens. In the climax of her performance, when her hips wine the fastest and the audience gets the loudest, smoke blazes up on either side of her dancing body. Within seconds Hinds has demonstrated that “yuh cyan wine like we.”

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 158.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 160.

³⁰¹ as Denise Belfon refers to her as she moves center stage.

Hinds's attire is tame compared to her collaborators. Her movement, accompanied by other visual effects and eliciting the most crowd response, is celebrated. Here in the context of Trinidad Carnival in 2009, Hinds's movement—which in other contexts, in other times, could be interpreted as obscene and out of step with the mores of a respectable lady—is a source of pride. In this way Hinds becomes one of the most respectable/refined *jammettes* of her time. While clearly celebrating the movements, sense of abandon, and African origins of her culture she is also careful to explain herself stating “I never go overboard. You'll never see me go down on the ground or lift my leg up. That's not even part of me. You can be sensuous and sexy without being slutty.”³⁰² While celebrating folk culture as central to a Barbadian and a wider Caribbean identity, she still maintains a middle class attitude. She has managed this balance between working class culture and middle class identity so well as to earn her the title of queen. In her performance of that title, however, she becomes a queen *of* the people rather than *over* them. Hinds carefully walks the line between the sociopolitical expectations of women in public that are based on a colonially imposed puritanical model and the cultural expectations of representing Barbadian people who define themselves in a complex manner that centers on the expression of a carefully controlled sense of abandon.

Last to take her turn is Denise Belfon (a.k.a. Saucy) also referred to during the performance as “Miss Teacher.” Saucy is often critiqued as a more traditional *jammette* whose performances feature and rely upon an unapologetic, raw sexuality.³⁰³ She takes her solo only at the insistence of Hinds and Destra, and after shyly stating that she has nothing to offer and giggling at the back of the stage. Once “*alla force* [her],” she directly addresses the ladies in the audience in a lesson of what they should do with their men once they get home. The lesson begins with the female audience members telling their lovers (coded here as male) “Saucy send me to deal with you.” In a single moment she goes from shy, demure, and girlish to a woman who is powerful, purposeful, and in control. Then, as Destra makes reference to the animal print, midriff bearing, skin tight body suit that Saucy wears by asking “Why yuh look like a porn star so?,” Saucy interrupts her lesson to tell her “I am a porn star.” Even when being interrupted, she displays a keen awareness of her performance. As Saucy continues the lesson demonstrating how the women should enter the bedroom, a young man from the audience finds his way on stage. In a most appropriate show of the autoerotic, Belfon sends him away saying, “I don't want no man. I teaching the ladies what to do right now. So go back down. And I'm going to ask you in a little while what it is you like. Go on.” Hinds and Garcia recognize her actions as “woman power.” Saucy goes on to continue the lesson demonstrating her wine which ends with her trembling her backside and right leg.

Saucy is both unapologetic and in control. As a fairly short woman with curves and a bit of a belly, her body does not fit traditional Western standards of beauty, yet she displays it willingly leaving little to the imagination. She owns her movement and her role as a performer. The space of the stage is in her control, and while both her persona and her performance assume heteronormativity, she does not need a man to demonstrate her feminine power. Rather the idea of man becomes more important than the physical embodiment as she enacts her autoerotic power in a very public way.

³⁰² Dikobe, “Doing She Own Thing,” 154. Quoted from Marcia Henville. “The Lowdown on Alison Hinds Real Bumper!” *Trinidad Sunday Express*, January 24, 1999:19.

³⁰³ Dikobe, “Doing She Own Thing,” 150-54.

The three come together again for the chorus and continue to demonstrate how they are obsessive winners by getting “three bumpers going at the same time.” Lining up according to the size of their backsides—“big, bigger, humungous”—Garcia, Saucy, and Hinds begin to move together.³⁰⁴ They must first adjust their timing to match each other in order to enact the collective performance of power that their execution of the dance relays. They begin moving in unison, but their movements become more individualized as the rhythm climaxes, displaying the agreement between their individual performance styles and their collective performance of female power. The performance ends with the three women singing the chorus of the song, followed by a collective hug, kisses on the cheek, and a shimmy of their breasts.

Their “woman power,” their public performance of the erotic, is both individual and collective. Set within a Carnival performance the atmosphere of “letting go” is an expectation. The movements they use to display their erotic power are part of a familiar set of cultural practices most celebrated at Carnival time. These performers (like many Caribbean women and men) use the movement of their hips, the wine, in order to perform Caribbeanness. This performance, enacted by three female performers with a special attention to the female body, is a collective performance of Caribbean femininity; one where each performer distinguishes herself as an individual and as part of the collective. By embracing these practices and the ethos of “letting go” in a very public arena, these performers call upon the historical trope of the *jammette*. But the ways in which they define their performance space, the control that they promote within their public performance, and the clear articulation of that control as “woman power” present a more contemporary enactment of the *jammette*.

Together the women represent a distinctly female power rooted in their presentation of the movement of their bodies, their ownership of their bodies, and their ownership of the space in which they perform. The male musicians, though present and important to the execution of the song, are largely absent in this part of the performance. The camera does not focus on the male bodies. The musical accompaniment is scarce as the three women speak to each other and their audience, and even the rhythms serve to accent the movement of the female performers’ bodies.

Within this collective performance of Caribbean femininity, of the erotic, Alison Hinds stands out. The other performers, the audience, and the stage effects mark her body and movement as exceptional. The ways in which Alison interacts with her audience display a deep understanding of performance, representation, and craftsmanship that is both endearing to fans and fellow performers and earns Hinds the right to the throne of Soca Queen. Her movement and her audience interaction are firmly rooted in the tradition of Caribbean performance that the other performers also enact, but performing on a Trinidadian stage and identifying with both the Trinidadians and Barbadians in the audience, her declaration that she has come to represent firmly places her as a representation of Barbados that has clear affinities with the neighboring nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Such an identification displays how her audience has extended beyond the shores of Barbados, and how it has firmly taken root throughout the Caribbean as she continues to reach toward a global audience base. Her mastery of skill demonstrates why her audiences have steadily grown over the length of her career. In short, they’re “obsessed with this,” and know they “can’t mess with this.” This obsession then trickles over to the nation and the women that Alison Hinds represents, giving audiences a curiosity if not an understanding of

³⁰⁴ It is important to note the context here. The women do not line up by body type, but according to the size of one body part, perhaps the most important body part in the Caribbean movement vocabulary.

Barbados, the place she calls home. The exceptionality that is demonstrated by the response of both her fellow performers and their audience attests to her right to reign as Soca Queen.

“I’M SO PROUD TO BE YOUR QUEEN”³⁰⁵

And always, I’ve always wanted to have songs out there that represent women. Because there are so many places where women are seen as second class, or you know they’re not permitted to go to school, or they’re just supposed to stay home and have kids and that’s it. And I felt like that was something that was missing. I didn’t want to do it in a way that I had to beat down the guys in order to make the women feel good. I just want to make the women feel good, and just let the guys know, you know, we love you. We still want you, you know. We do. But I just wanted to make it known, and have songs out there that women can feel comfortable singing, and feel good about, and know that this is about us, and this is a way for us to empower ourselves.³⁰⁶

In representing Barbadian women Alison Hinds is careful to avoid the more recent stereotypes that posit women as hard, conniving, and dangerous to men. Hinds has a proven record of producing songs that are meant to empower women, but she is also careful that in empowering women she does not disempower men.³⁰⁷ This form of dialogue between woman and man is evident in a number of Alison Hinds’s collaborations.³⁰⁸ Entering into the music business as a young teenager and the only female in a popular band, Hinds found a protective family in the men of Square One.³⁰⁹ Her womanist relation to male performers is shown in the 2009 video for “King and Queen,” a duet with popular Jamaican reggae artist Richie Spice featured on the albums *Caribbean Queen* and *Motherland Africa*. The video to the song visually demonstrates a collaborative partnership to man, places both Hinds and Spice within a history of black royalty, and opens Hinds’s performance as queen to an audience who may or may not be versed in Caribbean movement.³¹⁰

The video features a nuclear family wherein the parents (Hinds and Spice) give the two children (a boy and a girl) history lessons of famous black couples such as King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Emporer Haile Selassie I and Empress Mona, Winnie and Nelson Mandela, and Barack and Michelle Obama who are portrayed by actors throughout the video. The two singers sing to each other but the camera rarely focuses on them together and they only actually face each other three times in ninety-seven camera shots. They are man and woman, individual figures working together, complementing each other in a collaborative relationship while drawing on colonial ideals of masculinity and femininity by presenting a nuclear family.

The video begins with a shot of the family reading on the couch. The young boy is holding a paperback copy of *Africa: arts and cultures* edited by John Mack. The girl brings a

³⁰⁵ Hinds feat. Richie Spice, “King & Queen.” *Caribbean Queen*.

³⁰⁶ Hinds, interview with abcnews.

³⁰⁷ “Ladies Rule,” “The More you Get,” “Thundah,” and “Roll It Gal” are just a few examples all featured on her 2007 album, *Soca Queen*.

³⁰⁸ Alison Hinds has collaborated with such Caribbean performers as Blood, Jah Cure, Rupee, John King, Shaggy, and Moses just to name a few.

³⁰⁹ spliffietv, “Alison Hinds interview – Pt. 1.”

³¹⁰ Will, “King & Queen.”

leatherback book over for them to read entitled *Kings and Queens*. This family scene is the central storyline of the video. Hinds and Spice, working within the ideal structure of a nuclear family, are imparting a history lesson to the next generation. By drawing on various African couples throughout different time periods and ending with Barack and Michelle Obama, the two place themselves within a diasporic history of power and resistance. The scenes of King Solomon focus on his wisdom and his love of the Queen of Sheba as the camera goes back and forth between a depiction of the story of two mothers and the two monarchs seated on their thrones with the King being openly affectionate towards the Queen.³¹¹ The reenactment of Nelson and Winnie Mandela shows him pensive behind bars and her just as reflective seated in front of a free Mandela sign. This depiction ends as she visits him and the two embrace through the bars that imprison him. The final reenactment is of Barack and Michelle Obama. A preoccupied Barack Obama sits alone head in hand at the center of an office scene busy with books and campaign materials. Michelle enters to give him support. Leaning her head on his shoulder she gives the traditional view that he is the source of strength, while whispering in his ear and giving a fist pound she clearly becomes an encouraging force. Each couple features an extremely powerful man symbolizing wisdom, resistance, and possibility, but each man's power stems from the support, encouragement, and presence of the woman he loves.

In presenting these stories Hinds and Spice historicize the kind of cooperative relation that they embody and that their lyrics support. They do this within a diasporic framework. Including the cover of *Africa: Arts and Cultures* in the opening shot displays the investment in Africa that both Hinds and Spice have made a central part of their careers. As artists within distinctly Caribbean genres, this investment allows the two of them to represent the Caribbean region as a part of the African diaspora. Beginning with King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, their use of the tropes of king and queen become a diasporic resource as they elevate activists and political leaders from across continents to the status of royalty. The portrayal of each "royal" couple focuses on interdependence which encourages a (still unequal) sharing of power.

The presentation of Alison Hinds's and Richie Spice's bodies is central to the efficacy of the video. The fashion sense that they exude through their attire, the camera's framing of their bodies, and their subtle but constant movement, places the video within their contemporary aesthetic moment while building upon a historical base.³¹² Interspersed between scenes of the family and reenactments of historical kings and queens are (mainly) solo shots of Alison Hinds and Richie Spice. The settings vary from a plain white background to a room with red walls and modern furniture to what appears to be an alleyway with wooden doors set inside the stone walls of an archway. The fashion is just as varied and includes elegant black attire, bright flowing dresses, African mud cloth, and what could be called rock couture complete with a dreadlocked mohawk. Each scene strengthens the image of these performers as adaptable Caribbean artists who belong to and are inspired by various different musical and stylistic influences. Richie Spice wearing mud cloth and carrying a spear is an image that is familiar to his fans. He has fashioned himself as a proud African man born and raised in a Caribbean context. Yet the

³¹¹ This refers to the biblical story of two mothers from 1 Kings 3:16-28. King Solomon hears the case of two mothers both claiming to be the mother of one child. He orders the child split in half to appease both of them. As the sword is raised one mother cries out preferring to see the other woman have the child than for the baby to be under a sword. Solomon deduces that only the true mother would show such care thus deciding the case, and proving his wisdom.

³¹² For more on the importance of sartorial presentation in African diasporic contexts see Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*.



Figure 3.5

elegant black suit, the chocolate brown jacket over pressed khaki pants, and even the orange and black coat he wears are not unfamiliar looks for him. Alison Hinds shows her visual versatility as well with the kind of heavy bone and stone jewelry often seen in her album covers. Her dresses range from bright yellows and reds to all white, evoking both colonial ideas of purity and African diasporic sentiments of spirituality. Her long dreadlocks take on different forms from the aforementioned mohawk to a coiffure that allows for the length of her hair (long locks are often seen as a marker of a woman’s beauty) while providing her with a natural crown complete with a tiara of purple flowers. As varied as her different ensembles are, each – along with the way she carries herself – presents a sense of dignity, maturity, and softness creating an overall image of a woman quietly commanding respect.

Alison Hinds’s image in the “King and Queen” video is in many ways the end result of a slow transformation over the years. From timid beginnings, through a stage where she was criticized as overly sexual, and growing into the roles of mother and wife in the public eye, today Alison Hinds stands as a woman who encompasses all of these images in one. Her interviews display a calm, open and at the same time reserved woman; her stage performances and videos show a woman in control, outspoken, sexy, and dignified; and many of her endorsements and public service announcements rely on her role as a mother. Her role as the “Queen” within the “King and Queen” video encompasses all of these as well. She is a complement to Richie Spice as “King” and in conversation with the other queens featured in the video. Hinds carries herself with the same stature as the Queen of Sheba, the lyrics show the same kind of support that Winnie Mandela shows, and the few interactions that she has with Richie Spice display a playful encouragement similar to that present in Michelle Obama’s depiction. All of these women display an inner strength that they share as an expression of love for a man. Such an expression

is still built upon heteronormative gender roles. These women are powerful, but not threatening. This is an example of Ula Taylor's "community feminism," a space that marries feminism and nationalism by uplifting entire communities and empowering women even within "helpmate" roles.³¹³

While the video portrays Alison Hinds in the powerful roles of queen, mother, and wife, noticeably absent is the celebration of her body through the physical movements that have made her career. The dancing in this video is tame, fluid, and not a focal point. The camera does not show the bottom portion of either artist's body except when they are seated or in the four long camera shots. There is no view of the big "bumsy" that is central to the performance of "Obsessive Winers" or any of the movements that serve as the lyrical base of many if not most of Hinds's most popular songs.³¹⁴ Such an absence suggests that while her body is central to her image, Hinds has other assets to carry her successfully to wider audiences. The movements and celebration of movement central to her reign as Soca Queen take a back seat to a "safer" performance of Queen that relies on a performative and conservative respectability. In this way she still walks a fine line between the vulgar and the respectable black woman in public.³¹⁵ Although her public persona has pushed the limits of this dichotomy in the Caribbean setting,³¹⁶ her performance varies depending on the public she seeks to appeal to.

As a video, "King and Queen," has a much larger reaching audience than live performances such as the one described above. This audience is further broadened by the presence of Richie Spice who has his own impressive Caribbean and international following. Hinds does not explicitly promote Barbados in this video, neither orally nor visually, but she does enact the Barbadian femininity that she has been so consistent in performing. As the video for this song reaches out to a worldwide audience, it is important for Hinds to be relatable to as many people as possible. She and Spice do this through invoking a diasporic and historic blackness, the same iterations of blackness that have shaped her image over the last decade.

As Soca Queen, Alison Hinds's domain is clearly rooted in Caribbean culture. Through the "King and Queen" video she places herself within a larger diasporic discourse of royalty. That discourse varies from an Afrocentric celebration that urges all African descended peoples to imagine themselves as royalty in an effort at (perhaps an overly) corrective history to a strong critique at such royal utopianism in order to acknowledge that not everyone was/is royal and such imaginings can overlook the serious issues of the "commonfolk" as well as lead to disillusionment.³¹⁷ Hinds's performance of the Queen trope draws from both extremes of the African diasporic royalty discourse. Her celebration of blackness is built upon both a mythic African past and the present materialities of diasporic relations. She encourages pride in the same way that previous Afrocentric arguments have, yet her "queenliness" is a matter of service rather than subjugation. Her lyrics "I am so proud to be *your* queen" are both a romantic declaration and a statement of service to her audience. Her performance as Soca/Caribbean Queen serves as a tool for her to walk the line between representing a nation and crossing national boundaries, between upholding standards of respectability and pushing those standards to be more inclusive; but walking a middle road also defines the boundaries more clearly.

³¹³ Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 2.

³¹⁴ "Roll it Gal," "Confidence," "Wukkin Crazy," and "Brace and Wine" are just a few of Hinds's songs that celebrate Caribbean dances and women's execution of them.

³¹⁵ See Edmondson, "Public Spectacles" for more on the distinction between the vulgar and the respectable.

³¹⁶ Springer, "Roll it Gal," 106.

³¹⁷ See Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

Hinds's image works to demonstrate black female power through her performance of the role of queen, but it also tries not to offend. Ostensibly this video does the work that Hinds hopes, namely representing a strong, but respectable, educated, nuclear family who celebrates a diasporic history while practicing the prescribed roles of African "King and Queen." But the ways in which Alison Hinds represents as "Queen" silences other possibilities. Her representation is conservative, heteronormative, and beautifully torn between Barbados's many cultural influences and the tastes and expectations of a wider audience.

While the video draws on a diasporic history, it leaves out "undesirable" parts of the story such as the Mandelas' divorce, and the realities of premarital sex and queer sexualities. The nuclear family ideal that is proffered in the video is hardly representative of Barbadian or the broader Caribbean reality in which most people are raised in single parent households or extended kin networks. It is, however, representative of the ideal that colonialism proffered for centuries and that nationalism has taken up in colonialism's stead. This nuclear family ideal not only ignores the historical constructions of Barbadian families, it also builds on the heteronormativity and homophobia of the region.

Although the depiction of various queens in the video demonstrates a specific female power, the role of the daughter in the video holds little promise of this power. The camera shots that show the family often crop her out of the captured moment, and even when she is included she is in profile while the rest of the family smiles head on to camera or focuses on the young boy between Hinds and Spice. While the girl is the one who brings the book to the family (she brings the knowledge of an African diasporic past), she herself borders on exclusion.

Hinds's performance as a queen is one way in which she fights her own exclusion. When her fans gave her the title of Queen of Soca, they gave her representative status. No matter how wide her audience grows this title will always link her to the communities, the nation, and the region she represents. But no matter how well she represents them there will always be identities that are left out of the ideal image that she offers. In order to appease the majority she offers a powerful black femininity, one whose power is not too threatening to the social structures of old.



Figure 3.6

The way in which she is expanding her fan base—slowly, through diasporic connections—allows her to remain rooted in Afro-Caribbean communities while opening up the boundaries of that identity by showing the affinities and complexities of relations amongst diasporic populations.

Alison Hinds is an example of a Barbadian queen. A strong powerful woman, who complements man without quite needing him; who knows, builds, and spreads the power of her femininity without degrading masculinity. She is sensual but respectable. And most importantly, she knows it. When asked what it means for her to be a queen, Hinds's response spoke to the fact that she is always in the public eye. It is not a performance persona that she can take off when offstage, but one that she has chosen to actively pursue in both her stage performances and the quotidian performances of everyday life.³¹⁸ By approaching the performance of queen in the way that she does, Hinds receives the respect accorded that role both on and off the stage.

This is the most recognizably Barbadian woman moving into the international pop market. In physique, attitude, and performance she is the ideal queen, both inspiring and representing the people who populate her domain. Although specific performances (such as the Alison in Wonderland show in 2009) have been harshly critiqued, Alison Hinds's reign as Soca/Caribbean Queen has been undisputed. The question remains how wide her rule will extend as she slowly but surely increases her audience, and how her particular performance of black femininity will translate to these wider audiences. She represents both the nation of Barbados and the Caribbean region as a whole, but she also represents a particular form of black femininity that draws on both the puritanical ethics imbued by colonialism and various African and indigenous Caribbean practices of femininity.

Hinds consciously uses the embodiment of Barbadian (and Caribbean) femininity in order to expose the world to Barbadian culture. Many artists are working to take the genre of soca music into a more prominent position within global popular culture and find themselves clouded in arguments of cultural and musical standards, as well as issues of resources, copyright, and cultural translation. Alison agrees to some extent that much of soca music is part of the "jump and wave" designation which focuses merely on a party atmosphere specific to the Caribbean, and that this is one thing preventing the genre from growing beyond the markets of the Caribbean and the Caribbean diasporas. She attributes the popularity of her most widely popular single "Roll it Gal" to the subject matter of "woman power" that many different cultures and peoples can identify with. The song has a strong message while maintaining a fun vibe and party sound.³¹⁹ It is her performance as a queen within this song, one in which she is both self-possessed and able to empower others that ultimately leads to its popularity both within and outside of Caribbean shores.

Alison Hinds's distinct performance as a Caribbean Queen is a tool that she uses to fulfill the responsibilities she feels toward the nation of Barbados, the Caribbean region, and the women within these spaces. Such a representation requires balance. When asked what she would like a foreign audience to take away from her performances Hinds responds:

That Barbados is a vibrant little—it's a small island but it's very vibrant. We have a very rich culture...we know how to party and let go and just be, and we welcome everyone to be a part of what we have. And to take with them that special feeling, and that good

³¹⁸ Hinds, interview with author.

³¹⁹ spliffietv. "Alison Hinds – Pt. 3."

energy, and a couple of Bajan slang words, and learning how to wine the waist, and you know, just know how to really release and forget your worries for a little while. We all have that pressure, but I think we're very good at that, we're very good at just "yeah, we comin out to party so forget about the bills for now, we're just gonna let go."³²⁰

This attitude is one that is central to the genre of soca music that Hinds promotes, but she also believes that soca and Caribbean music in general must be about more than the party. Like many other artists, tourism ads, and ordinary citizens Hinds's music represents Barbados as a place of relaxation and release, bordering on enforcing historical myths and stereotypes of the Caribbean region as a tropical paradise. Her music, however, does not dismiss the pressures and social issues that people need release from. Hinds doesn't "cry down" party music, but believes that it must be balanced by social messages in order for the music to break into wider markets.³²¹ "Roll it Gal" is just one example of how such a balance can be executed.

As a solo artist Hinds understands that her individual efforts will not be enough to represent Barbados on a wider scale.³²² In a 2007 interview she explains: "I understand that it's not just gonna take me alone. I can't carry the world of soca on my back...but I can try to make inroads, to at least try to get a foot in de door and crack open the door for other artists to come through."³²³ This door leads to the global market, one which Barbados and the Caribbean region have always had a central role in, but post-independence they wish to insert more influence and assert a cultural identity within the global performances. While some Barbadian artists are looking to Los Angeles and New York in order to break into a North American market, Alison Hinds is looking broader than that. Her American audience is important, but only one part of the global audience she hopes to appeal to. As she continues to collaborate with other artists, to reach for wider audiences and to fly the flag of Barbados across the world she explains:

My albums are not about America and Americans buying but made for the world to enjoy from the heart of the Caribbean. I represent Caribbean peoples, especially the Caribbean woman, independent, sexy, strong, loving, mother, wife, sister, friend, total. That's the way I roll. I am your Caribbean Queen.³²⁴

In examining the ways that artists such as Alison Hinds represent themselves and the nations they come from, one can see how national identities interact with gendered identities; the ways in which national interests and individual careers meet in commodity markets; and how individual artists imagine themselves as representatives. Through an erotic performance of femininity that relies on the trope of queen as a diasporic resource, Alison Hinds is able to negotiate a career as an artist and a national representative. She accomplishes this through pushing the limits of "respectable" femininity, and using her own femininity in service of representing Barbados and the wider Caribbean region.

³²⁰ Hinds, interview with author.

³²¹ spliffietv. "Alison Hinds – Pt. 3."

³²² Even in terms of her own stage performances, Hinds is careful to give credit to the teams of people who make each show possible.

³²³ Alison Hinds. 2007. Interview with spliffiecarib.com. accessed via youtube.com.

³²⁴ Jackson. "Alison Hinds Aim."

Chapter Four

“Love You All”: Barbadian Masculinity

“Good morning king. Happy New Year. Is this de way to...” An early morning drive to see the sun rise on New Year’s Day 2010 brings a sense of peace to the island. The display of respect between the two men before me now is refreshing in contrast to those my friend and I witnessed just an hour before. Two men broke into an argument in the middle of an Old Year’s Night celebration in the streets of Holetown.³²⁵ The Holetown party is one of the more popular in Barbados on Old Year’s night, but as the liquor flowed and the crowds began to thin some altercation was expected to arise. As soon as the men’s voices began to get loud and attract attention, their friends pulled them away from each other before it turned physical. One walked away. The other continued to yell after him, chest puffed out, face askew with anger “If I catch he on de street ...” Onlookers looked unimpressed. A well-traveled couple to my left spoke of how Barbadians are all talk. The woman noted how if it were Jamaica, the U.S., or anywhere else, somebody would have been dead by that point. Her friends agreed, careful not to wish such violence on Barbados, but also noting the imitation of “the killer persona” in the bravado of the man still yelling down the street. Standing on the beach an hour later surrounded by people drenched in a peaceful calm with the sun rising on a new decade, it seemed that there were mainly two models for young men in Barbados: kings and killers.

“Good morning king,” and “How’s it going, killer” are both common greetings amongst the younger generations of Barbadian men. Each identification asserts an unmistakable power: one based in the royalty of empire, the other in the ability to hold one’s life in limbo. A desire for such power dates back centuries into a colonial past where few men were able to execute the sociopolitical power that defined masculinity within the colonial ideal. For most, masculinity was practiced against something else: against femininity, against coloniality, against a perceived “effiminacy” (often referring to a particularly Barbadian form of homophobia), indeed against any sense of powerlessness. Such a search for power manifested in the language of manhood where men were often called by their professions, other nicknames, or powerful figures such as “general.” Post-independence, terms like “general” (which as a military term had colonial implications) were replaced by other models, namely king and killer. These terms, arguably, have more linguistic significance than performative power. They reveal perceptions, aspirations, and redefinitions, but the search for empire or the penchant for killing by and large do not translate literally in the performances of post-independence Barbadian men.

In colonial Barbados masculinity depended in large part on sexual conquest, virility shown through fathering children, and a public image that often (but not always) included violence. Very often, Barbadian men searched for power through their relations with women. In rum shops, galleries, and under street lights men articulated masculinity as “natural facts” rather than social constructions. In short, “man is man.” In his 1987 study of Barbadian masculinity Graham Dann notes how much of these discourses, even post-independence, arise through the

³²⁵ Old Year’s Night is another name for New Year’s Eve. Holetown is a city centrally located on the West Coast of the island. It is one of the bigger sites of commerce outside of the capital Bridgetown.

gendered nature of early socialization. He demonstrates how school training genders the labor market as boys and girls are steered toward different occupations. Home structures also function as a site that defines the ways in which children perceive masculinity and femininity. Dann concludes that “socialization is sex typed, and that the subsequent image that Barbadian men have of their womenfolk will, to a certain extent, be based on the separation of life into two spheres.”³²⁶

Further, even homophobia as a practice of “ideal” masculinity is built upon a model of strict gender roles in society creating “a panorama of views on homosexuality which range from total rejection to half-hearted acceptance. Nevertheless, underpinning most, to a greater or lesser extent, is the all too familiar sex typed dualistic world of male and female in which woman is subservient to man.”³²⁷ This notion of female subservience is one of the linchpins of colonial liberalism encouraged in post-Emancipation Barbados, and one of the defining factors of Barbadian masculinity operating in a society where the colonial ideal of powerful man has always been challenged by Afro-Caribbean practices of femininity and sociopolitical structures that leave few areas for men to exert such assumed power.

The women’s movements (internationally and on the island) changed the role of women within national discourse and the overall health of the nation, thus changing the relation between “woman” and “man.” The Barbadian government was one of the first in the region to directly address women’s issues by instituting the Women’s Bureau in 1976. Barbadian men responded in two ways. Anti-woman men’s movements formed,³²⁸ but at the same time some within a younger generation of men began showing a growing sensitivity to gender issues: domestic abuse was no longer acceptable, the role of Barbadian fathers began to be much more involved, and masculinity became more of a partnership with femininity in younger generations.³²⁹ In his study Dann found that “Generally speaking, interviewees were far more tolerant of Women’s Liberation than homosexuality,” and that “there appears to be a slight linkage between having a positive attitude towards women and being prepared to respect their bodily rights in the context of a sexual relationship.”³³⁰ Bodily rights, however, are not quite the same as social roles which are still entrenched in a heteropatriarchal system. Dann goes on to state “that any role reversal, in which woman assumes the superordinate position in a relationship, will also be regarded with suspicion by men,”³³¹ suggesting that while gender definitions are changing, it has been a slow process that has yet to approach gender equity. While Barbadian masculinity is still very much defined in relation to femininity and is still entrenched within a heteropatriarchal system, in the twenty-first century it is also defined by a responsibility to the nation centered on familial duty, and a balance between service and economic upward mobility. The king and killer binary is one way in which to represent a search for male power in post-independence Barbados. Political structures and political figures have been both lionized and vilified in the media and in public memory as stately kings and servants of the nation and as power hungry protectors of their own reputations and those of their political parties.

³²⁶ Dann, *The Barbadian Male*, 8. Such an observation echoes the basis of Peter Wilson’s arguments, but Dann notes the ways in which perception and reality interact with much more specificity, and in using the words of the study’s participants, Dann does not make the kind of sweeping generalizations that Wilson did a decade earlier.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

³²⁸ For example the National Men’s Forum. See Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 12.

³²⁹ Barrow, “Caribbean Masculinities,” 46-48.

³³⁰ Dann, *The Barbadian Male*, 60.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Even with this pervasive binary of king and killer, in post-independence Barbados, men perform masculinity in many more ways than historically allowed. This chapter focuses on popular soca performer, Rupert “Rupee” Clarke, as an example of a prominent post-independence Barbadian man whose masculine practices differ from colonial generations, and from other Caribbean male artists within the global mass market. Through his “love you all” aesthetic, Rupee performs Barbadian masculinity through a sense of duty and responsibility to God, to the Barbadian nation, and to women. Rupee represents this contemporary masculinity through his critiques of male-female relations, his celebration of women, and his encouragement of responsible sensuality through both his HIV/AIDS activism and his critiques of and advice for younger artists. As a “homegrown” artist who signed a deal with Atlantic Records, a major international label, Rupee takes his role as a performer, as a representative of Barbados and as a man in the public eye, very seriously. Rupee’s performance of masculinity is still founded upon a heteronormative patriarchy as he promises to always “love, protect, and respect de women,” but he uses this form of masculinity to market himself and to “fly the flag of Barbados and put it on the map.”

Rupee’s persona as a heterosexual Barbadian man and his performance as a representative of Barbadian culture is based on love. Rupee’s varied performances (as man, singer, representative) are in conversation with many theorists and writers who “understand ‘love’ as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement.”³³² The inclusive nature of his performance (he “loves you *all*”) constitutes what Chela Sandoval terms a “neorhetoric of love in the postmodern world,”³³³ because it seeks to unite subordinated populations and to change both the boundaries of power and the sites in which it is contested.

Rupee’s performance both creates and mirrors the space for identities that cross national and regional borders to come together and physically be moved by his music while intangibly being moved toward an ethos of “‘love,’ understood as a technology for social transformation.”³³⁴ Such a performance is still rooted in a national pride and a specific Barbadian male experience, but it becomes an avenue through which Rupee enacts his catch phrase by showing that regardless of nationality, he does indeed “love you all.” Such love transcends a surface reading of heterosexual attraction (a love for women) and extends to love for national culture, love for the power of performance (performative representation), and a greater love for humanity. As national and gendered identities continue to shift in a postmodern global world, Rupee’s approach of an international performance of Barbadian masculinity rooted in love divorces his image from violent representations of the developing world and empowers his image with a discourse of love that crosses ideological and rhetorical boundaries. The silences in his performance of masculinity, however, trouble the inclusiveness of his “love you all” declarations, thus limiting the power that a discourse of love has on representations of identity. Namely, in working within AIDS discourses while remaining virtually silent on homophobia and its effects within Caribbean masculinity, Rupee curtails the transformative potential of his masculine performances.

³³² Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 157. Sandoval is reading this “neorhetoric of love” through the work of Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 130.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

This chapter begins with a brief look at Caribbean male artists and Rupee's early performing career in order to contextualize the ways that Rupee takes Barbadian masculinity and Barbadian culture to a wider market using a creative blend of distinctly Barbadian forms and those more popular with foreign audiences. Rupee draws on previous performance tropes and discourses, but situates them in his contemporary moment bringing his personal history and his personal vision into the performance arena. Further, using Rupee's public persona as an example of Caribbean masculinity, this chapter will interrogate different tropes of Caribbean men, their relationships and attitudes toward Caribbean women, and how Rupee's performance of masculinity has contributed to his success as a performer and as a representative of Barbados. Through the analytic of "temptation," I argue that Rupee's reputation of being popular with and respectful of women, and his negotiation of this reputation, underscores larger negotiations between local and global markets and the issues of representation that such negotiations present. Both the temptations of female fans and the larger temptations of fame take a back seat in a more important pursuit of expressing love. By analyzing Rupee's attention to women within his activism, I highlight his silence on queer discourses and explore the possible reasons for such silence within his representations of the nation.

THIS IS RUPEE

In 1975 a youthful white German woman gave birth to her youngest son, Rupert Clarke. Rupert's father was an Afro-Barbadian man serving in the British military ranks living with his family on a base in Germany. Rupert remembers being a fun-loving child who loved to eat and who was close to his parents, especially his mother who affectionately called him "Rupee." Growing up in Europe, Rupert "Rupee" Clarke was not immune to the influence of the images and music coming out of the Caribbean. Rupee explains: "my household was West Indian and [my father] was always playing like Bob Marley and Red Plastic Bag and Sparrow. Me mom now was playing the Rolling Stones and Bob Dillon [sic]. So I've got quite a diverse musical taste instilled in me."³³⁵

While Rupee was being indoctrinated with a diverse musical taste abroad, the cultural and sociopolitical landscapes of the Caribbean were undergoing significant changes. In Jamaica, the decade after independence in 1962 had produced economic instability and society had continued to be rigidly stratified. People once seen as outliers and vagabonds were becoming more visible as "rude boys" and Rastafarians two subcultures of the island nation. The music became grittier, more socio-politically oriented, and began to make incursions into larger markets. In Barbados a similar phenomenon was occurring in the music scene. Only decades before, the island was tied to "high culture" in the form of Brahms and Beethoven on the one radio station instituted on the island.³³⁶ By the mid 1970s, Trinidadian calypso was making inroads and the traditional forms of tuk and calypso that had gone underground in the World War II period began to slowly gain more respect amongst the Barbadian masses.³³⁷ With the rebirth of Crop Over in 1974 as a tourist attraction, the relationship between indigenous cultural forms and foreign money was becoming institutionalized. Performing a national culture was one way

³³⁵ Clarke, Interview with Maya Trotz, 2003.

³³⁶ Carter, interview; Rudder, *Different Drummer*, 28.

³³⁷ Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 24-25.

to stay economically afloat, and the upsurge in tourism brought the Caribbean region into the international eye, even if only as a paradise fantasy.

By the time Rupee was born in 1975 the world's image of the Caribbean region had changed drastically due to one man, Bob Marley. Marley's "world-wide popularity put Jamaica on the map like never before, superseding the association which Harry Belafonte had had with the island when he recorded his first songs about Jamaica a decade earlier."³³⁸ Marley's image, however, was not necessarily one that the entire Jamaican nation or Caribbean region was ready to enthusiastically endorse. He had long since outgrown the clean-cut doo-wop aesthetic of his early music career, and settled into the image of a "sufferah." This image melded those of the earlier Jamaican "rude boy" and the increasingly visible Rastafarian culture, by focusing on those in society who felt the brunt of the economic and political crises of the 1970s. The album art to the Wailers break out album *Catch a Fire* put these images—rude boy, Rasta, sufferah— together in the form of a candid head shot of Bob Marley smoking a big spliff.³³⁹ This was not an image of British empire, or an independent Jamaican civility. Bob Marley's unruly hair, his assumed shirtlessness, his unshaven chin, and his direct gaze at the viewer out over an illegal substance did not fit the bourgeois standards of any society.

This was an image that circulated far beyond the borders of Jamaica, beyond the waters of the Caribbean Sea, and beyond even the Caribbean communities abroad. The juxtaposition of

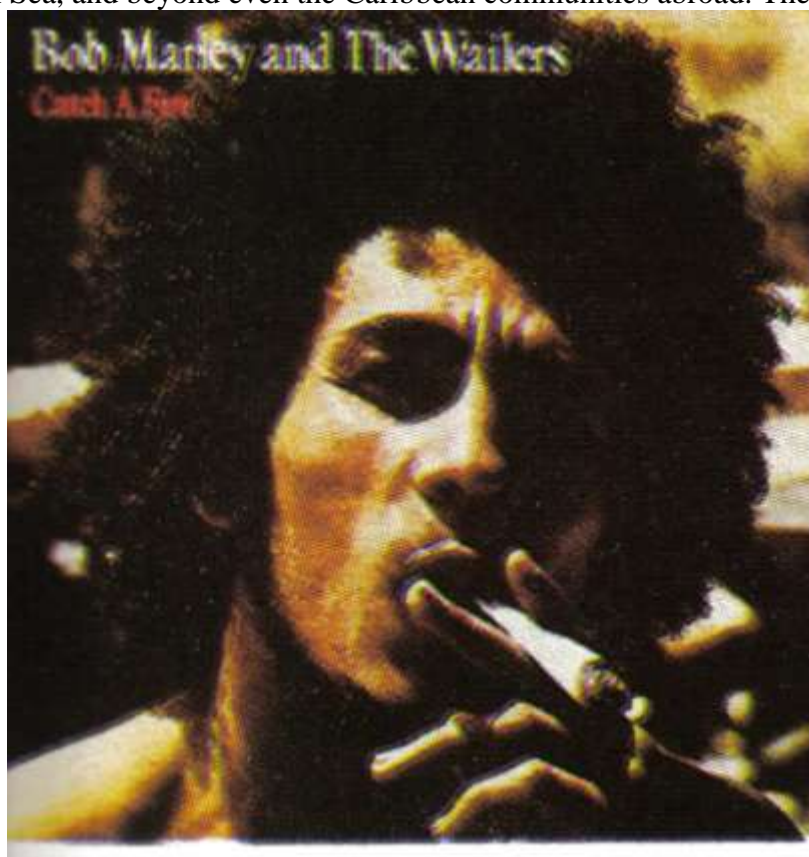


Figure 4.1

³³⁸Whitney and Hussey. *Bob Marley Reggae King*, 16.

³³⁹ A spliff is a cannabis and tobacco cigarette.

the title and the image did not help matters. The title, *Catch a Fire*, carries connotations of contagion. There were serious implications in the threat of what was signified in this image spreading. The album appeared internationally only years after urban rebellions in the U.S. and (sometimes violent) decolonization efforts across the world. Both the title and the image evoke memories of rebellions where the enslaved would set fire to cane fields and watch both the flames and the spirit of rebellion spread throughout and across plantations. As this cover traveled, such a connotation was subversive in suggesting that a sense of rebellion could be contagious, and perhaps just as infectious as the popularity of Marley's music.

As one of the most widely circulating images of a Caribbean man, Marley was extremely influential to young male artists born in the 1960s and 1970s in the Caribbean. His public image moved from a quick to fight "Tuff Gong" to pensive and wise "Natural Mystic," and for a time after his death the subversive elements of his image and his legacy were explicitly removed by music retailers and the Jamaican nation-state who preferred to focus on his message of "One Love" in the 1980s and early 1990s multicultural moment.³⁴⁰ In the last ten years of his life he was reified as both young Jamaican "killer" and Rastafarian "king," and his level of success encouraged younger artists whose enthusiasm caught like fire.

In Barbados, young artists were also looking to the likes of The Mighty Gabby, Red Plastic Bag, Grynner, and the Mighty Dragon as examples. These artists did not carry the subversive visual aesthetics of Marley, but they did seek to speak for "sufferahs." Their art form, calypso, had been denigrated in many ways within a colonial society that looked to Europe as a cultural standard. Their predecessors traveled as strolling minstrels surviving off of the generosity of individuals, practicing the art by literally singing for their supper.³⁴¹ The tradition of calypso (and the social commentary that characterizes it) has a long standing history on the island, dating back (at least) to early plantation songs. As longtime calypsonian Red Plastic Bag defines it, the role of the calypsonian is "being a mirror of society, being the people's newspaper, being the representative of the masses, being that representative of the people who are considered to be in the low socioeconomic bracket."³⁴² Bag, Gabby, Grynner, and Dragon worked to be included officially in the revival of Crop Over in the 1970s and bring repute back to their work and the voices it represents. By 1985 Barbadian calypsonians had established themselves as some of the most respected in the region.

At the same time the Clarke family, including ten-year-old Rupee, relocated to Barbados. Rupee eventually entered the annual Richard Stoute Teen Talent competition and launched his own musical career. Winning the contest in 1993, he went on to join the previous year's winner Adrian Clarke and another contestant Terencia (TC) Coward in the popular group Coalishun.³⁴³ They had regional success with songs such as "Tundah" which details the competitive atmosphere of the dance floor, where a young man's reputation is threatened by the presence, boasting, and movement of a woman. Ultimately the song is about who can out dance whom, who can control whom on the dance floor and the social implications of such a contest. In songs such as this one a man's control over a woman (and thus his reputation) still defines masculine rhetoric. The song gives credit and respect to the woman, however, by boasting of her skill.

³⁴⁰ Stephen, "Babylon's Natural Mystic," 156-58.

³⁴¹ Shillingford 'Shilling' Agard, Cammie Reid, Mighty Slammer, Mighty Jerry, Blackman, and Mighty Pointer, practiced calypso in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. See Marshall, *Notes on the History*, 24-25.

³⁴² Stedson, interview.

³⁴³ The group's performance style was similar to their contemporaries, but relied much more heavily on an older calypso performance aesthetic rather than what Susan Harewood terms "vibe performance."

It was the 1996 hit “Ice Cream” that really solidified the image that Rupee would become known for. The song likens a woman to dessert in the chorus “de gal so soft and sweet like ice cream.” The tone of the song is playful, slightly sensual, and although it follows in the tradition of objectifying and consuming the female body, it is most often received as complimentary and respectful. Rupee’s public persona became tied to these themes. Coalishun disbanded after five years and each member continued the musical craft becoming staples within the musical tradition of Barbadian Crop Over competitions. Rupee’s solo efforts continued to “uplift” and “respect” women with songs such as “She’s A Winner,” “Hold Me Tight,” and “Enjoy Yourself.”

Rupee captured Barbadian, regional, and Caribbean diasporic attention as a solo artist in 2000 with the single “Jump.” The song won the Party Monarch competition that summer.³⁴⁴ Throughout the early 1990s, Rupee sported braids that, coupled with his light skin, reminded many in his audience of the Jamaican performer Red Rat.³⁴⁵ At times he was even mistaken for his contemporary who he would collaborate with in 2003. As Rupee came into his own as a solo artist he began to change his image visually by moving away from his earlier Red Rat look and relying on a more U.S. hip hop informed fashion aesthetic which would dominate the covers of his next three solo albums (*Blame it on the Music* 2001, *Leave A Message* 2002, and *thisisrupee.com* 2003).

Musically Rupee was neither king nor killer early in his career, but fell more into the Caribbean tradition of saga boys or sweet-talkers. Songs like “Tundah” and “Hold Me Tight” exemplify this lyrically and vocally. His visual image, however, does not reflect this. The album cover to his first solo attempt is much less controversial than that of the *Catch a Fire* album, but includes some elements of rebellion. A practicing graphic designer at the time, Rupee composed the packaging of this album, displaying an authorship over his image that is not common for many musical artists. He relies on a (slightly outdated) hip hop aesthetic including a bandanna, gold chain, leather jacket, and direct gaze at the camera. One does not see the presence of weed as in the *Catch a Fire* album cover, nor is Rupee’s body sexualized by shirtlessness. Unlike the deep contrasts of shadow and light on the *Catch a Fire* cover, on *blame it on the music* (and throughout many of his promotional images) Rupee’s face is well lit. The images often play with his light skin tone. Here as a “red man” his skin is juxtaposed against the warm yellows and the cool purples of the background. Relying on a U.S. hip hop visual aesthetic rather than an indigenous Caribbean one can be read as an attempt at rebellion, or “hardness,” but such an attempt is undercut by the background image of a smiling, dancing Rupee. While the forefront image is direct, the background image sends the message that it’s all in good fun. The juxtaposition leaves one with the same king/killer binary, but the “killer” image is undercut by that of the smiling “king.”

Rupee’s next album cover leaves all smiles behind. It features a direct, close-up head shot positioned next to his trademark. Not only is the smile gone, but so is any eye contact with the viewer as Rupee wears dark sunglasses. The composition of the cover extends the theme of the album, *Leave A Message*. By framing the head shot in such a way that half of his face is out

³⁴⁴ Party Monarch is one of many performance competitions within Barbados’s Crop Over festival. See chapter two, page 51.

³⁴⁵ Early in Caribbean colonial history (the seventeenth century) poor white workers were derisively referred to as red legs. In the contemporary language “red” is used to describe anyone with light skin and the term has lost some of its earlier stigma. Red Rat’s stage name is derived from this history and his light skin tone. See Sheppard, *The “Redlegs” of Barbados*.

of the shot, slightly tilted away from the text, the composition gives the illusion that Rupee already has one foot out of the door, thus one should leave a message. The composition also positions Rupee as a larger than life image. His public face is too big for the frame and serves to frame his logo. The use of a logo suggests that Rupee has created a brand for his public image, which signifies his presence even as he is leaving the frame. Such allusions to movement and absence are not to be interpreted as an attempt to leave Barbados behind. The content of the album roots Rupee in Barbadian tradition, by repeatedly imploring listeners to “leave a message” because Rupee is off at festival celebrations and won’t be home any time soon. He communicates this message of Barbadian nationalism visually in the color scheme of this album cover, using his light skin tone, sunglasses, and a blue background to create the blue, gold, and black of the national flag.

With his third album, Rupee uses not only his logo, but also introduces his own signature clothing line. He is unsmiling and framed within a fairly sterile color scheme. The foreground image of him still plays on the theme of being too big for the frame, but this time he confronts the viewer with a direct gaze. There is a contrast between the seriousness of the foreground image (which features a collared shirt and direct gaze) and the background image where Rupee is dressed more casually in baggy jeans, sneakers, and a cap, looking off to the side. This album cover does not feature any explicitly nationalistic messages, but does display two not entirely different snapshots at masculinity.

When twenty-something-year-old Rupee released these albums he had a serious decision to make. Although he had been crafting his career as a musician, he was also an accredited,



Figure 4.4

practicing graphic designer. His audience as a performer, however, was steadily growing and maintaining both careers had become too taxing to sustain. Meanwhile, Jamaican dancehall music was breaking outside of the Caribbean market and there were indications that soca music could do the same.

Radio host and scholar Donna P. Hope details the different subcategories of dancehall deejays: girls dem, slackness, bad-man, Rastafari, and all-rounder.³⁴⁶ The girls dem deejays and slackness deejays often overlap,³⁴⁷ and are characterized by a focus on sexual prowess often including lyrics so sexually explicit they are banned from radio. One example is Shabba Ranks who broke into the U.S. market with “Mr. Loverman” in the 1990s. Bad-man djs focus on violence or violent threats often graphically detailed in lyrics and performed with “menacing body language.” Rastafari djs subscribe to the Rastafari belief and their musical content and physical appearance includes Rasta symbols of religiosity. All-arounder djs cut across categorization using elements of multiple categories. Beeniemann is one of the most popular representations of an all-around Jamaican dj. These categorizations crossed over into the U.S. market (especially the girls dem djs and all-arounders) in the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s. Popular music video shows such as BET’s *Caribbean Rhythms* sought to reach out to Caribbean-American populations and served as a doorway for a wider audience to consume Caribbean music. The U.K. market welcomed artists such as Jamaican-American Shaggy who would later find fame in the U.S. market as well. Shabba Ranks, Shaggy, and Beeniemann’s success in the U.S. market was based mainly on their songs about women and sexual prowess.

Originally released November 23, 2004, Jamaican dancehall artist, Beeniemann’s song “King of the Dancehall” is exemplary of the ways in which sex and power interact in the dancehall genre and subsequently in the construction of Caribbean masculinity within the public imagination. With the chorus of “‘Pon bed, ‘pon floor, against wall/ We sex dem all till dem call me/ I’m de girls dem sugar dat’s all/ Welcome de king of de dancehall” the song’s erotic content is clear for even the least versed in Jamaican idiom. The title “King of the Dancehall” places Beeniemann on the throne; he is a king in this context. Contrary to the title of the song, the lyrics suggest that his domain is the female body rather than the dancehall space. In a study of Caribbean masculinities Christine Barrow explains that “at the core of Caribbean masculinity is sexuality, defined as sexual prowess, adventure and the conquest of many women... Male reputation also depends on being seen to be in control of female partners.”³⁴⁸ Beeniemann’s power as “King of the Dancehall” rests in his ability to boast of the sexual conquest of many women. He becomes both king and, to some degree, killer, as it is his purported conquest of the female body that gives him the right to reign.

In terms of Caribbean men in the mass music market, Jamaica had largely cornered the market in the early twenty-first century, but the Eastern Caribbean made a tiny inroad when Kevin Lyttle’s “Turn Me On” reached the U.S. in September of 2004. Lyttle had recorded the song three years earlier in a small studio in St. Vincent.³⁴⁹ “Turn Me On” reached regional success throughout the Caribbean and in Caribbean communities abroad, which eventually led the song to become “an international smash. It went No. 1 in the States and became a Top 10

³⁴⁶ Hope. *Inna di Dancehall*, 31. In the Jamaican context the term deejay has a different meaning than in the U.S. context. Here it can be read as a vocal performer.

³⁴⁷ Girls dem djs are male and focus on the female body, while slackness djs can be female such as Lady Saw.

³⁴⁸ Barrow, “Caribbean Masculinities,” 47-48.

³⁴⁹ Wartofsky, “Island in the Song.”

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Figure 4.5

single in much of the rest of the world.”³⁵⁰ Lyttle signed with Atlantic Records in 2003 joining Jamaican artists Sean Paul, Elephant Man, and Wayne Wonder. “Turn Me On” is a soca ballad that features the bright colors and scantily clad bodies of Carnival in the video. The choice to include Carnival costumes can be read as a direct attempt to represent the Eastern Caribbean where Carnival celebrations are more present than in Jamaica. The song’s slow, yet up-tempo sweetness prepared the audience for another “king” of soca who was soon to join the ranks of Caribbean men on the Atlantic label—Rupée.

At the time of his signing to Atlantic, Rupée was much more well-known in the Caribbean region/soca circuit than Kevin Lyttle, but many outside of the Caribbean and Caribbean emigrant communities had yet to hear of him. His advertising at the time placed him firmly in the canon of Caribbean artists on Atlantic’s label as evidenced in Figure 4.5. This advertisement is from the September/October 2004 issue of *Caribbean Beat* magazine, the in flight magazine for Caribbean Airlines. Rupée shows the same visual aesthetic as Sean Paul (they have similar skin tones and body types, and their choice of fashion is also similar); and fans who have heard “Turn Me On” and Rupée’s Atlantic debut single “Tempted to Touch” could easily make the musical connections between Rupée and Kevin Lyttle. In advertisements such as this one, Rupée is visually supported by and inserted into the image of Caribbean male musical artists already within the imagination of a growing public.

Rupée’s style draws on the artists that have entered the international market before him, but remains distinct. He engages the various artistic influences he was exposed to, but remains centered in the calypso/soca aesthetic. Within this aesthetic he attempts to change the meanings and associations of the music, furthering the image of a king by consciously acknowledging his role as a representative and role model. He explains: “What I do with my music is that I create soca music, I create calypso, I fuse elements of dancehall. You know I try to encourage people to have fun, to love one another, to have a good time, and still yet inject little elements of spirituality.”³⁵¹ Such attempts are overt in songs such as “Thanks” and “Last Mas” on his earlier albums. With choruses such as “Put your hands where my eyes can see and give thanks for the festival” and “Enjoy yourself in de mass/ ‘cause you never know it could be your last,” Rupée attempts to bring a sense of responsibility and spirituality to party atmospheres using performance standards that ask the audience to show their hands and enjoy themselves while at the same time asking them to “give thanks and praise on festival day.” In live performances he enacts this aesthetic in his interactions with the audience, often asking them to look at themselves and explicitly stating that Caribbean music and Caribbean culture is about enjoying oneself within a vibe of pleasure and peace.³⁵² Such practices are central to Rupée’s “love you all” performance aesthetic and can be read as part of his discourse of love. Using his music he seeks to promote Barbadian culture to a worldwide audience, while at the same time highlighting human mortality by using practices common throughout many different forms. Namely he seeks to unite his audience and reorient them toward a new consciousness.

His first album on the Atlantic label, *Ion1*, does not include such overt iterations of spirituality, but lyrically still differs (rather drastically at times) from that of his contemporaries. Most of the songs are based in a party aesthetic, but songs such as “What Happens in de Party”

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Clarke, interview with author.

³⁵² Such statements have historical precedents within Barbadian music, notably calypsonian Red Plastic Bag’s song “Caribbean Music.”

bring the specifics of Barbadian party etiquette to a larger audience, and “Woman, I’ll Always Be There” (to be analyzed in further detail later) has a much more serious tone. Overall Rupee’s intention with his first album on the Atlantic label is clear: “*Ion I*, which is the title of the album, is going to allow a totally new audience to get one on one with me...this music and where it’s from, this culture, and what it’s about. That’s what it’s going to be, one on one, me and you.”³⁵³ He intends to give himself to a much larger audience, including the culture, rhythms, traditions, and attitudes that have shaped who he is.

Such an attempt is made visually in the packaging of the album. On the front cover of *Ion I*, we see a pensive Rupee. His eyes are cast down and to the left of the camera frame. His arm rests on something that is just out of focus. With his arm resting in such a way that his watch is turned to his ear, the image offers the suggestion that he is listening to time pass. In the background on the upper left hand side of the image, we see the beginnings of a sunset over a wharf. The water blends with the wharf in shadow, while the colors of the sky feel warm against the blinding white of Rupee’s shirt and hat. The background and much of the right side of the image is washed out in white light, which takes the objects out of focus. Centered is Rupee, with slightly golden skin, and an earring dissolved into the white of his hat, shirt, and lighting. His mustache and beard are carefully groomed, and his hair is cut short and just barely visible under

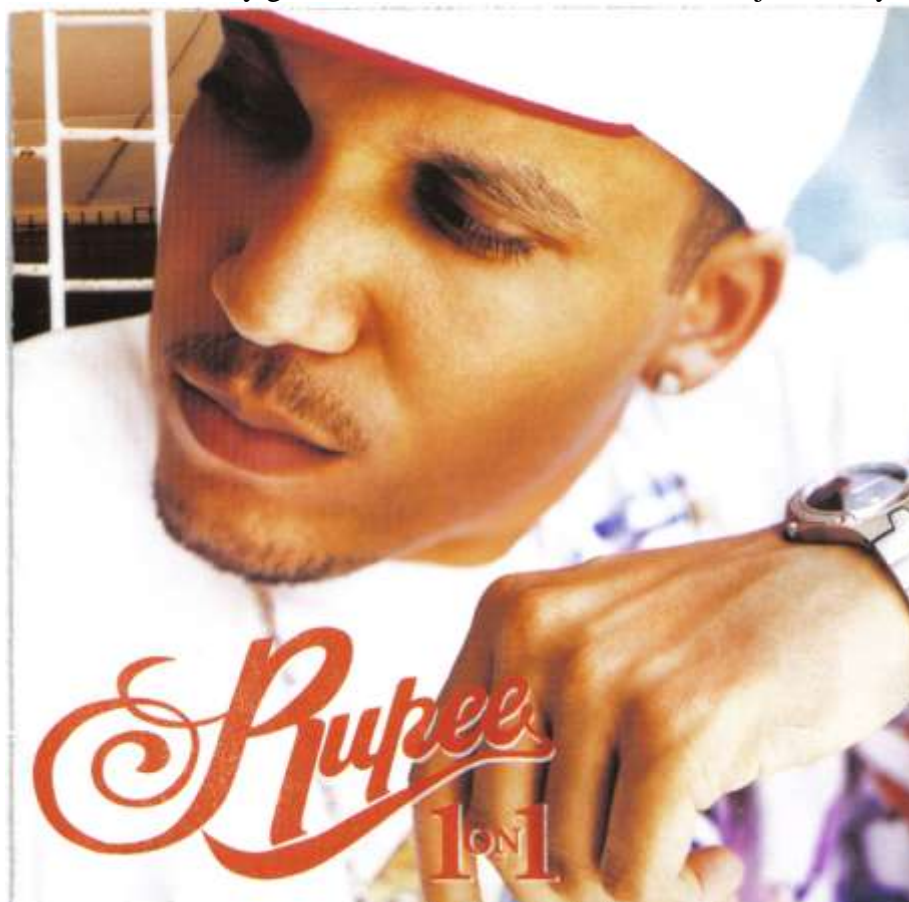


Figure 4.6

³⁵³ Untitled video clip (no longer available), accessed September 14, 2009. <http://www.myspace.com/rupeemusic/>.

a white hat with red trim. The lighting and his posture suggest an awareness of the calmness behind him (waterfront sunset) while he is still listening to the bright tune of time passing. His face is lit so that the half that is facing the waterfront is in a slight shadow. His features are clear. The composition of the image offers a calmness that seems contrary to the brightness, but the two are reconciled in the figure of Rupee himself. The color scheme may be a subtle hint to Rupee's main cause as an activist—HIV/AIDS awareness. Many benefit shows ask attendees to dress in red and white for the cause. The composition of this cover, rife with contrasts between light and dark, sharp and unclear, represent how Rupee is able to project a bright, lively, and "positive," image while being aware of the more pensive, darker realities.

Rupee's international debut song "Tempted to Touch" distinguishes him from the "king/killer" image of his Jamaican dancehall labelmates, and musically is more sophisticated than Kevin Lyttle's "Turn Me On." Lyrically it draws on the same theme of heterosexual attraction, but without the conquering elements of "King of the Dancehall," or even the sweetly-sung forcefulness of "If you think you're going to get away from me/ You better change your mind/ You're going hooome, you're going home with me tonight" in Lyttle's "Turn Me On." "Tempted to Touch" is built on attraction, and Rupee's "need" for the woman he sings to. In this sense, his enactment of Caribbean manhood is very much in line with some of the newer practices of Barbadian masculinity that rely on a sense of partnership between man and woman, and express desire without conquest. Rupee is "tempted." He says what he wants in the song, not what he is going to take.

The song's debut and subsequent reception was very much influenced by other Caribbean artists in the market, but Rupee consciously tries to distinguish himself as a *soca* "king," and to symbolize the nation of Barbados with such a representation:

Up until this day some people in mainstream America classify soca as reggae music... so you hear "New reggae music from Sean Paul, new reggae music from Rupee," but at the end of the day Sean Paul has opened a lot of doors for other artists in the Caribbean, and it's up to us to pass through these doors and use them to the best of our ability, and we have one foot in it. We have to get the other one in it and use those channels to educate people and let 'em know, well you know, soca music isn't dancehall. It isn't reggae. Every music out of the Caribbean doesn't come from Jamaica. You know, there are islands like Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Trinidad.³⁵⁴

As one of few artists from the Eastern Caribbean breaking into a large mainstream market, representing both the similarities and the particularities of Barbadian music was very important. Rupee's international debut hints at the temptations that lie on the other side of that door, their possible effects on definitions of manhood, and on national identities.

TEMPTATION AND REPRESENTATION

Silla had learned its expression early from her mother and the other women as they paused in the canefields and lifted their sun-blackened, enigmatic faces to the sea, as they walked down the white marl roads with the heavy baskets poised lightly on their heads

³⁵⁴ Clarke, interview with author.

and their bodies flowing forward in grace and restraint. They seemed to use this beauty not to attract but to stave off all that might lessen their strength. When a man looked at them he did not immediately feel the stir in his groin, but uneasiness first and then the challenge to prove himself between those thighs, to rise from them when he was spent and see respect and not contempt in their faces. For somehow their respect would mean his mastery of all of life; their contempt his failure.³⁵⁵

For centuries Barbadians defined masculinity in relation to femininity. In colonial Barbados Barbadian masculinity was predicated on and policed by a heteronormative control of the female body in response to a lack of real socioeconomic and political control of the nation.³⁵⁶ Historically, gender relations in Barbados relied upon an exchange of strength and respect through actual and possible physicality. Relationships relied on love and fear. Although men and women interacted within a highly patriarchal structure, ultimately women held the defining (even if subservient) role because “as long as masculinity means control over women, women have the power to disrupt male identities.”³⁵⁷ Paule Marshall displays this in the above excerpt from her 1981 novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Writing of a pre-independence generation, Marshall shows how a Barbadian woman’s beauty became a spectacle to men, and the possibility of physical/sexual contact conflated with the want of a woman’s respect became the defining factor of masculinity. Such desire colored gender relations on the island, and within the patriarchal structures of colonialism and later nationalism, a man’s “mastery of all of life” was intrinsically linked to his relation with the women surrounding him: his sexual relations, his (sometimes physical) control of their movement, his respect and/or abuse.³⁵⁸ Barbadian masculinity was an unwritten challenge to “prove [one]self.”

There have been significant changes in Barbadian masculinity since independence. In Christine Barrow’s study in the early 1990s she found that “in general, men of the older generation defined an asymmetrical relationship with their wives and partners confirming their own authority, while the younger men were more inclined to conjugal equality.”³⁵⁹ Performances of masculinity on the island are still defined by heteropatriarchy, but “men of the younger generation, especially those who are more educated and of the middle class, tended to define their role as husbands more as one of protector and supporter... Speaking of their relationships, especially marriage, they referred to trust, love and mutual affection and less to overt authority.”³⁶⁰ This is the generation of Barbadian men that Rupee was born into.

More than a few interviewers and fans ask Rupee about his relationship to his many female supporters. Often, he skirts the question. When answering directly he diverts the personal/sexual attraction to a more neutral response of “I respect the support from the

³⁵⁵ Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 135.

³⁵⁶ Griffith, *I’m Your Father, Boy*, 44.

³⁵⁷ Barrow, introduction to *Caribbean Portraits*, xxxvii.

³⁵⁸ Such an analysis is not meant to erase the existence of homosexual men in Barbadian society, but (especially pre-independence) Barbadians viewed homosexuality as incongruent with dominant definitions of manhood and thus homosexual men were often derisively referred to as “she-shes.” Those who were out in society experienced the liminality of being a part of their communities, but not a part of masculine ideals. Such a space is ensconced within a passive aggressive homophobia, often misread as tolerance because of the relative lack of physical violence, but rarely misunderstood as acceptance.

³⁵⁹ Barrow, “Caribbean Masculinities,” 44-45.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

women.”³⁶¹ Such an answer is rooted in a masculine public performance of silence about private affairs (outside of the bragging of the all male arenas), while it carefully distances Rupee from practices of conquest or a sense of entitlement by declaring his respect. Whereas earlier generations of Barbadian men and women expected infidelity (to some degree), in some songs such as a 2000 collaboration with Alison Hinds, “Be With You,” or in “Punked” Rupee turns the reality of romantic infidelity into a joke.³⁶² His focus on the ladies, however, is not always celebrated in all circles. Rupee’s male fans who, at times, feel neglected also question him. His response of “respect bredren...you know how it is..with so many beautiful ladies showing love it’s hard to stay focused man...blessings,”³⁶³ takes the conversation back to his female fan base while producing a kinship with other heterosexual men and invoking a sense of spirituality by ending with “blessings.” Being exposed to larger and larger audiences, it is not only the temptation of female fans, but more general temptations of success that Rupee has had to contend with. This dual temptation works together in Rupee’s performances. He has built his career on lyrics that express love and respect toward women, and used that career to express his love for the nation of Barbados. The nation stands in for the woman he proves himself to as it is his Barbadian audience he hopes to return to “and see respect and not contempt in their faces.”³⁶⁴

In 2005, *SHECaribbean* magazine debuted its seventh anniversary edition with two up and coming Barbadian faces: Rupee and Tennille Stoute.³⁶⁵ *SHECaribbean* promotes itself as “the only magazine dedicated to the Caribbean woman.”³⁶⁶ At the time of this issue Rupee had achieved success throughout the Caribbean, had been signed to Atlantic Records, and accordingly had won the attention if not the hearts of many women. The cover shot shows a man in control and seems slightly at odds with the “Reluctant Romeo” in the title of the article. The contradiction is enhanced as Rupee bites his lower lip gazing at the camera. He wears his signature line of clothing, both presenting himself uniquely and displaying business acumen. In his embrace of Tenille he does not detract from her powerful stance, suggesting his performance of masculinity is in partnership rather than competition with femininity. Subsequent photos accompanying the article show Rupee playing piano alone and with three models lying atop it looking adoringly at him, as well as solo shots where he is both playful and serious.³⁶⁷ The models vary in skin tone, hair length, and style presenting slightly different forms of beauty.³⁶⁸ Rupee’s upward smile toward the small bevy of diverse beauties enacts his “love you all” aesthetic.

³⁶¹ Clarke, interview with Andre C.Y. Choo Quan.

³⁶² The chorus to “Be With you” includes a line asking collaborator Alison Hinds to stay with him, even if he cheated. She doesn’t find it funny in the song, but it is excused as a joke. In “Punked” Rupee uses the “fake moans” of a deceitful lover as the main support for the rhythm of the song.

³⁶³ Rupee’s facebook page, accessed November 15, 2009. <https://www.facebook.com/TheRealRupee?fref=ts>.

³⁶⁴ Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 135.

³⁶⁵ Tennille Stoute is a Barbadian model whose career at the time of this cover had just turned international with her signing to Karin Models in NY.

³⁶⁶ See <http://shecaribbean.com/> (home page).

³⁶⁷ All photos were taken at the Barbados Hilton, giving the entire shoot a local flavor and a sense of luxury, while the interview for the article took place thousands of miles away in London, pointing to the ubiquity of Bajans/Rupee’s schedule. The distance crossed to produce the article is indicative of both the centrality of migration to Barbadian life, and the necessity of travel for those that seek to represent the nation on a global scale.

³⁶⁸ They all wear white, suggesting innocence, and mid-level stiletto heels and makeup, suggesting the construction of beauty aesthetics.

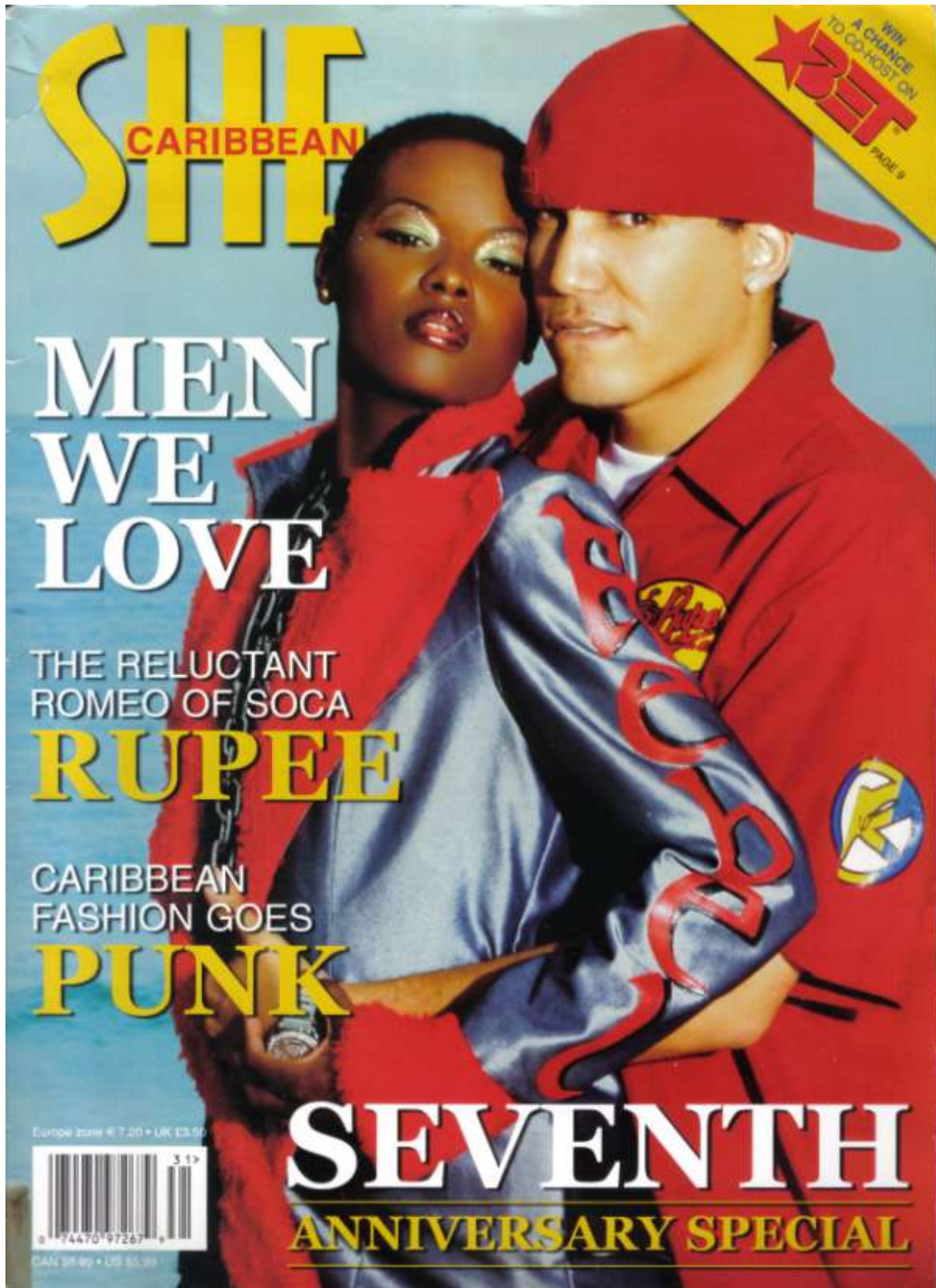


Figure 4.7

The content of the article explains Rupee's pronounced reluctance of the "Romeo" title. He details the experience of losing both of his parents to AIDS. In explaining how his father had extramarital sexual relations while on tour in the military and contracted the disease before passing it on to Rupee's mother, Rupee reveals why he both welcomes and is wary of too much attention from his female fans.

With his family's history, 'safe' is always the first thought for this young man with the hypnotic Bajan lilt.³⁶⁹ "I've been very fortunate in that I have a lot of female attention. I can find myself in very jeopardizing situations and actually temptation is around every corner. My parents' situation always comes back to me. It keeps my focus straight, humbles me and reminds me of the consequences of doing something like that."³⁷⁰

Answers such as this one show how Rupee maintains control of his career, by carefully controlling his physical contact with his female fans. His position as a public performer and a representative of Barbados makes him want "to sit and chat with anyone who shows an interest in his art form,"³⁷¹ but his personal experiences remind him of the gravity of giving into the temptations that such availability can offer.

This sense of control differs in some ways from that of previous generations of Barbadian men. Barbadian masculinity has been naturalized by "man is man" discourses that are often weakly supported by biological justifications based on sex and virility. As Christine Barrow points out, these notions contradict a monogamous nuclear family ideal, resulting in an emphasis on virility that often works in tandem with infidelity creating the common phenomenon of "outside" children. Such practices, "virility and the corollary, infidelity [have] been identified as intrinsic to Caribbean masculinity."³⁷² It isn't only the fathering of children that matters, but sex in general was extremely important to Caribbean men's sense of masculinity in Barrow's study: "A male, after all, was not a man unless—and to the extent to which—he could boast among peers of his sexual conquests."³⁷³ Virility and the need for sex are naturalized in the men's responses as an "uncontrollable urge rooted in biological and genetic make up—it's natural, men can't help it."³⁷⁴ The Bajan men in the study were not unique in this, responding that they continue these practices "to keep you knowing you is man."³⁷⁵ This becomes a circular logic wherein these men embark on sexual conquests because they are men, and that is "naturally" what men do, and they know that they are men because of their ability to sexually conquer women. In Rupee's practice of control, a woman's body is not the site to prove one's "mastery of all life," although women's respect is still very much important.

Years after the *SHECaribbean* photo shoot, no stranger to stardom, Rupee still seems reluctant of the Romeo title. While friendly and outwardly appreciative of the support of his (female) fans, he performs his reluctance in moments such as the one caught by the camera in

³⁶⁹ In Barbados "safe" also has a slightly different vernacular meaning of okay as in "Everything safe man, everything good."

³⁷⁰ Taylor, "Rupee: The Reluctant Romeo," 36.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Barrow, "Caribbean Masculinities," 155.

³⁷³ Ibid., 40.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 41.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 40.



Figure 4.8

figure 4.8. This photo was taken and posted to Rupee’s facebook page by one of his fans. The previous photo showed Rupee in a one-on-one shot with the young woman at the center of this photo. It seems that within moments he became overwhelmed with others looking for the same one-on-one opportunity. He still has his arm around the young woman with the glasses and is not pushing anyone away, but looks wary of how the photo opportunity has progressed into a potentially dangerous situation. This photo captures Rupee’s willingness to be available to his fans, and how overwhelming that can be at times. Moments such as these present a possible loss of mastery over a situation that, since Rupee’s persona is constructed as available to his audience, is a definitive part of his performance as a man in the public eye.

The temptations that Rupee faces come from his various performances as a soca performer, a heterosexual man, and not unrelatedly as a representative of contemporary Barbadian culture, which has been promoted vigorously through musical performance sites.³⁷⁶ When I sat down with Rupee in 2009 he explained how his popularity with his female fans is partly due to the nature of his music and the sites of its performance:

Yeah, it’s uh, it’s not easy, because of the vibe and the energy and the erotic element that comes with the music period. It’s very sensual, very sexy. It involves a lot of revelry, a lot of mas, and uh, it’s pretty hard. Especially considering the slot that I fit into. It was just a natural evolution that came about, me doing songs that generally uplift and honor women in many respects. As you so rightly said, temptations are out there all the time,

³⁷⁶ See chapter two, pages 50-55; Harewood, “Policy and Performance.”

and especially considering the kind of songs I write and the environments that I'm always in, lots of women, lots of drinks flowing, good vibes. But I use my life's experiences to keep me grounded and, allow me to be focused, because I really must admit, it's not easy man. It's not easy at all.³⁷⁷

While Rupee does admit that “he has been less than a saint,”³⁷⁸ because “man is man, you know,”³⁷⁹ his public persona is one that is sexually responsible. In representing Barbados he relies on the symbols of women, drinks, and vibes that have been promoted as desirable parts of Barbadian culture and are built upon historical representations of the Caribbean as an exotic/erotic paradise, but in doing so he is careful to publicly disassociate himself from the kind of “excessive” sexuality that can become dangerous in an age where diseases such as AIDS are prevalent.

Rupee distances himself from older narratives of Barbadian masculinity that focus on virility, but even in this distance he reaffirms the older discourses of “natural” sexuality by positing his reactions as “not easy.” He stays grounded within older performances of Barbadian masculinity while reshaping them. Working within the soca genre is one way in which to stay grounded in Barbadian forms while representing a younger generation. Audiences often see soca as party music especially when contrasted to the social commentary prevalent in its musical predecessor, calypso. While such a strict dichotomy has been troubled by scholars such as Curwen Best and Susan Harewood, and artists such as Terencia “TC” Coward, Red Plastic Bag, and Edwin Yearwood to name a few, the association between soca and a party atmosphere remains strong. Rupee’s music, his interviews, and his public persona seek to cull together the different audiences of party music and serious social commentary. He underscores his attempt to reach a wide audience with his catchphrase “love you all.”

Rupee enacts his performative “love you all” aesthetic with a consciousness of the weight that such an utterance can hold whether it be toward a specific crowd of women or in speaking to a global audience. When speaking of his first single on the Atlantic label, “Tempted to Touch,” Rupee explains how the song is meant to apply to more than a physical attraction:

I took the rhythm, took it home, absorbed it, vibesed it and when I was writing it I mentally put myself inside of a dancehall. Not even necessarily a dancehall, actually, any situation where a woman puts herself before you and you're just tempted to touch her. It might not be physically, it might be mentally, or spiritually. It's real, everybody can relate to it.³⁸⁰

In writing the song Rupee made a conscious attempt to make it relatable to as many people as possible (or at least everyone who feels tempted by women). The song first appeared on his 2002 album *Leave a Message*, and reappeared on his subsequent album *thisisrupee.com*, before becoming the lead single for his first album on the Atlantic label *I on I*. “Tempted to Touch” was then featured as the lead single for the soundtrack of the 2004 James Bond film *After the Sunset*. While the song directly addresses a man being tempted by a woman, Rupee explains

³⁷⁷ Clarke, interview with author.

³⁷⁸ Taylor, “Rupee: The Reluctant Romeo,” 36.

³⁷⁹ Clarke, interview with author.

³⁸⁰ Clarke, interview with Maya Trotz, 2003.

how the theme is more universal than man/woman relations: “Temptation is something we all face on a daily basis... You know, if you’re on a diet and you pass a piece of cake that you’re not supposed to eat, you’re tempted to eat it even though you shouldn’t.”³⁸¹ Considering the wide circulation of the song, I argue that the accompanying video and its circulation extends the theme of temptation beyond romantic relations to the temptations of a global market.³⁸²

Rupee was already a star within Caribbean markets before signing to Atlantic Records in 2004, but his multi-album deal with the label gave him greater resources and a larger audience. By 2005 he had been seen in venues as diverse as “MTV to BET, from Japan to Madrid, from Germany to Barbados,” and the album had “already gone gold in Japan [before it was] scheduled to drop in August, 2005 in the U.S.”³⁸³ With all of the worldwide attention it would have been quite easy for Rupee to forget the small island that he calls home, but with his debut video he made it clear to his Barbadian audience that he would not be tempted by the limelight.

We didn’t want it to be shot in a studio with girls in Carnival costumes or a somewhat fabricated scene and maybe a beach somewhere in the States. We wanted to catch that true authentic element. And even though it put somewhat of a strain on the budget, we fought really hard to have it shot in Barbados. And because of my manager’s links at de time, we were able to get Hype Williams on the set who hadn’t really done a major video in a long time. He was more focused on advertising. And it was somewhat, it was kind of his reentry into the music video game. He came down to Barbados and all of the Atlantic staff came through and he basically conceptualized the video. ... He put it together and naturally we made it, we made shots of Barbados an integral part of the video, and it was received very very well man. Very well.”³⁸⁴

The video draws on stereotypical Caribbean tropes that easily appeal to larger audiences by focusing on scantily clad women and a sense of leisure, but it also strives to not so subtly represent Barbados.³⁸⁵ Hype Williams’s expertise within black popular music in the U.S. and in advertising allowed him to construct a visual aesthetic that appeals to both a U.S. crowd and sells the images of Rupee, and Barbados. By including various national symbols, the video further promotes Barbados to a larger audience while appealing to Barbadian audiences who can feel proud to see such national representations in venues as popular as MTV, BET, and Yahoo music.

The very first shot of the video is of a woman’s large behind wearing a fashionable mini skirt and walking down the street. The shot is quick and easy to miss, but it alludes to representations of women in popular hip hop videos of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, while giving one a taste of the visuals yet to come. The next shots are of Rupee at a table in a rum shop playing dominoes. This is a commonplace scene in the West Indies, and is often associated with Caribbean men (though women also play dominoes). Domino games allow for a display of skill, the right to brag, and (as dominoes are often slammed on the table for effect) a performative element of Caribbean culture. The game’s association with men is rooted in the fact that it is often played in what are considered male spaces: bars, shops, under

³⁸¹ Rashbaum, “Rupee Educating People.”

³⁸² My analysis will focus on the first version of the video. A second version was released featuring scenes from the *After the Sunset* film.

³⁸³ Clarke, interview with Maya Trotz, 2005.

³⁸⁴ Clarke, interview with author.

³⁸⁵ shyguy974. “Rupee – Tempted to Touch.”

streetlights with makeshift tables. Such an association illustrates the stereotypical idea the public spaces are male and private spaces are female. Dominoes have to a large extent taken the place of warri within Caribbean traditions.³⁸⁶ Warri is a traditional game with ties to African and Asian cultures, and while warri is still played, WWII imported Italian dominoes such that the display of skill that used to be enacted through warri is now enacted within dominoes. The presence of dominoes within the “Tempted to Touch” video provides a look at a “safe” practice of Caribbean masculinity and signifies the cultural hybridity that is both representative of the Caribbean region and a constructed technique to reach various audiences.

For those North American viewers that might not appreciate the beauty of a good game of dominoes, Rupee reaches out to them by wearing a Baltimore Orioles hat, but to be very specific of where he is from, there is a bandanna of the Bajan flag tucked just beneath, hidden in plain view for the benefit of those who will recognize it. A young woman wines her waist between the bar stools as Rupee sings his song and plays a domino with a smile. Interspersed throughout the video, but especially during the hook, are scenes of Rupee and female dancers. Most scenes take place on the beach, but beach or no beach all of the dancers wear skimpy bikinis. Rupee interacts with both the camera and the dancers as he is tempted to touch them. The dancers—in the rum shop, on the beach, and in the non-descript setting of the hook—are all being watched by the camera or the men present, but they rarely acknowledge their audience. These women, like those in Marshall’s novel, “use [their] beauty to stave all that might lessen their strength.”³⁸⁷ Rupee watches and dances with them, however, he does not seem to rely on them in his “mastery of life.” As the central figure of the video he is already master of the scene, both at home and in control. While the women are dressed in beachwear, Rupee wears an Atlanta Braves hat with a matching white jersey. The beach scenes allude to a sense of leisure that is promoted both in many popular American music videos and in tourist advertisements for the island.

The next verse takes us to a Bajan hot spot: Swan Street. Located in the capital of the island nation Swan Street is a well-known site. This major shopping thoroughfare is open to pedestrian traffic only and features more local vendors than many of the other major streets in the city. The fading stonewalls and the sight of vendors and shoppers lingering on the sidewalks is easily recognizable for most Barbadians. The camera gives the viewer a quick glance of the street sign just in case there was any doubt. We see the large behind from before, now attached to a whole woman, walking down the street with a purpose. Rupee waits, holding up the side of a gray stone building as she approaches. The camera moves to a minibus, which is a particular Bajan phenomenon. There are three major forms of public transportation (taxi excluded): The federally funded Mercedes Benz full sized transit buses, the small privately owned locally operated ZR vans, and the medium sized, privately owned, federally regulated, flag colored minibuses, whose drivers are known for their reckless skill. This is the bus in Rupee’s video. This is the bus he sits on to sing as a dancer tempts him (although these buses are rarely empty enough to allow room for anyone to dance as she does). He sits on this bus wearing a Chicago Bulls cap comfortably. The U.S. creeps in once again if ever so subtly as his two audiences merge.

Throughout these first two verses there is a distinct difference in the presentation of male and female bodies. The women are all scantily clad, while the men are all fully dressed. The

³⁸⁶ also called mancala in other traditions.

³⁸⁷ Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 135.

women's movements are highlighted by camera angles, the colors and cuts of their clothing, and the attention given them by the men present. The men's bodies are rather sedentary. Those in the rum shop sit or lean against the bar or wall. Rupee, even while interacting with the dancers, doesn't move very much. The dancers dance on him, more than with him. One woman sucks on a lollipop while dancing alluding to the same kind of historical representations of consumption associated with a (sweet) female body. There is little about the presentation of bodies in the video that is distinctly Barbadian, but when juxtaposed with national symbols and snapshots of the island, which are presented both in the style of music video and Caribbean advertisement, the differences take on more meaning. The women's bodies become another Barbadian asset, another Barbadian sight for foreign viewing audiences.

The scenes of the last verse, though, are truly Bajan. Halfway through the verse Rupee appears behind turntables, microphone in hand, infectious smile on his face, wearing the most beautiful sight a homesick Bajan has ever seen. Falling over his shoulders just right, Rupee's upper body is covered in a button down jersey made of the Barbadian flag. Across his body are the blue of the sea, the yellow of the sand, and the blue of the sky, with a broken trident broken once again across his chest. A slight ways above his smile lays yet another cap, this one blue and gold, with the flag again front and center. The rest of the video is a montage of night scenes, some with Rupee in control behind the turntables, and others where he sparkles in the crowd decked out in white. But even in these latter scenes the eager Bajan can pick out a flag waving in the background. In this way Rupee plays on imagery to create different meanings for his different audiences. Although this last verse still includes male/female interactions, by placing these interactions in the midst of a crowded club with dark lighting the focus of the viewer shifts to the solo shots of Rupee. In reaching out to a mass market audience, Rupee embodies Barbados by inscribing the most recognizable national symbol on his own body. He literally wears his national pride.

"Tempted to Touch" is Rupee's first big international video. He makes it a point to foreground Barbados in this video, but he also reaches out to the normative MTV market. The camera shots of beaches and bikinis are not foreign to popular American aesthetics that often feature such images as signs of luxury and leisure. Conversely, the American sports apparel that Rupee dons is quite popular on the island as well. The audience for this visual work is widespread with circulation across the globe. Yet the visual images, detached and preserved, send different messages to different audiences. An American might see it as one more booty-shaking video on a beach. They might pick up on the logos of the different sports teams he wears. Rupee has negotiated his different audiences well here. The video clearly feeds the needs of MTV nation who vote month after month to put similar videos with half-naked women and decent beats on the countdowns. But it also reminds Bajans at home and abroad that Rupee has not forgotten who made him a star. In an interview he pays homage to his home by stating "At the end of the day, no matter how much I have succeeded, I can't overlook my carnival...Crop Over is what made me. I exist because of Crop Over."³⁸⁸ He has not forgotten the local festival where he began his musical career, nor the Bajan audience that set him on his path of success.

Rupee consciously represents Barbados, but perhaps less consciously represents Barbadian masculinity, which has undergone major historical shifts. The first shift occurred with Emancipation which changed societal ideals if not actual roles. The (largely Anglican) church and colonial powers encouraged Afro-Barbadian men to uphold a system of patriarchy. The

³⁸⁸ Charles, "Soca's Blend."

question was: “How could this new patriarchal model be realized in the contest of powerlessness and racist oppression; unemployment, minimal wages, alienation from the land and poverty; and black female personal and economic autonomy and resistance to the wife/mother stereotype?”³⁸⁹ The contradiction between the ideal and societal realities remained throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is one way in which the different cultural standards that make up a national identity manifest themselves in specific gendered identities as well.

Another shift occurred in the late 1970s when the world experienced an international feminist movement to which Barbados was not immune. A decade after independence the new nation-state was one of the first in the region to institutionalize a Women’s Bureau in 1976. Rhoda Rheddock notes how investigations into “women’s” issues during this time period began with the assumption that something was wrong with femininity, but increasingly began to examine masculinity as well. This is reflected in Barbados as the government changed the name of the Women’s Bureau to the Bureau of Gender Affairs in 1999.³⁹⁰ Within the post-independence generation of Barbadian men there were significant reactions to feminism: “Whereas some men have sought simply to fight back against the women’s movement, others have seized the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences of masculinity and manhood, in the same way as women for the past four decades have done for femininity and womanhood.”³⁹¹ Many of these reflections have geared Barbadian masculinity in slightly different directions than previous generations.

As a Barbadian man who makes a living in the public eye, Rupee has based his career on love, exercised as a duty to God, to the nation of Barbados, and to women everywhere. He asserts that he is not tempted by material successes when he states: “I don’t want to cling to the Mercedes-Benz, I’m just thankful for the opportunity. I’ve been happy for the fact that, in the past few years, I’ve made an impact on people’s lives, whether it be ten or 15 people; or ten to fifteen thousand. The Almighty gave me the opportunity and I used it. I’m happy, I’m living my dream.”³⁹² He articulates such a dream in the interludes of his earlier albums, within interviews, at concerts, and in blogs. Rupee says that he is proud to see thousands of people moving to his music, to have the opportunity to represent Barbados, and to promote Caribbean culture as peaceful and fun. This is the kind of Barbadian masculinity, and Barbadian culture that is promoted in the “Tempted to Touch” video.

This is not to suggest that Barbadian masculinity has wholly outgrown older practices of control and domination over women, or that post-independence Barbados has reached gender equity. Some of Rupee’s contemporaries in Barbados have been accused of the kind of misogyny and homophobia that is associated with pre-independence practices. (Lil’ Rick’s promotion of hard juks and the controversy surrounding Peter Ram’s “Pat and Crank” are just a few that come to mind.)³⁹³ It is to say that artists such as Rupee who actively seek to represent Barbados abroad

³⁸⁹ Barrow, “Caribbean Masculinities,” 38-39.

³⁹⁰ Barriteau, *Political Economy of Gender*, 92.

³⁹¹ Reddock, “Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Introduction,” xiii.

³⁹² Taylor, “Rupee: The Reluctant Romeo,” 36.

³⁹³ Lil Rick (also known as Hypa Dawg and Ricki Minaj) is another Barbadian performer who is very popular in Barbados. Many of his performances include a call for and display of hard juks (strong pelvic thrusts) suggesting that his performance of masculinity centers on sexual virility, “hardness,” and physical display. See Harewood, “Transnational Soca Performances.” In 2010 another popular Barbadian performer, Peter Ram, produced “Pat and Crank” a song celebrating female masturbation. A fan uploaded a video for the song to youtube using images of

have a gentler sense of masculinity that is focused on veneration, respect, and partnership, and that this is the image of Barbadian men that travels the world through concert sites, blogs, magazines, and videos. Such a masculinity is still very much ingrained in heterosexual patriarchy, but the difference is that women are to be both respected and protected. It is not necessarily fighting against anything.

“WOMAN, I’LL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU”

Always love, protect, and respect de ladies.³⁹⁴

First released on his 2001 album *Blame It on the Music*, “Woman, I’ll Always Be There” is a tribute to Rupee’s mother. Using an analysis of a 2005 performance of this song in Guyana at the Don’t Dis Me concert,³⁹⁵ a concert dedicated to lifting the stigma of HIV/AIDS throughout the Caribbean,³⁹⁶ I argue that Rupee’s personal connection to this song and his public performance of it displays the ways in which various relationships have changed on the island of Barbados in the last forty years: mother/son relations, man/woman relations, and the relation between what used to be a private disease and public awareness. Such performances represent, in some ways, a break with both the historical performance traditions of the island and the expectations placed on Caribbean male performers in the wider market.

Rupee begins this section of his performance by detailing the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the disease’s associated stigma. By telling a stadium full of people “Guyana if I have ever wanted you to listen to me before, I wan’ yuh listen to me now more than ever,” Rupee brings the revelry atmosphere of a big stadium show into conversation with the event’s purpose, namely erasing the stigma of HIV/AIDS. Briefly talking to the audience, Rupee normalizes AIDS by comparing it to cancer and diabetes, clearly stating that it is not a homosexual or drug related disease before telling the story behind the song he is about to perform. Introducing the song in this way disidentifies AIDS from a queer body in the context of homophobia.³⁹⁷ Rupee is an AIDS affected though not infected person who identifies with those who have the disease, but not the stigmatized connotations of homosexuality and drug use. This is the crux of his activism, and is possible because of his particular performance of masculinity. Such a disidentification of HIV/AIDS from the queer body is important in the Caribbean context, and in the context of Caribbean (male) performers on the global stage. Rupee’s public persona is based on his love and respect for women. In many ways he has become a poster child for masculine strength that is not overbearing in a region where many still invent a connection between weakness and homosexuality.

women interspersed with images of Peter Ram. The video caused a controversy with critics accusing Peter Ram of blatant misogyny.

³⁹⁴ Rupee, “Words Four.” *Blame it on the Music*.

³⁹⁵ GuyanaLive. “Don’t Dis Me Concert.”

³⁹⁶ The Don’t Dis Me campaign was started by the Guyanese government and supported by business. Similar campaigns to fight stigma and increase voluntary testing have been started throughout the Caribbean, one of the most visible being Jamaica’s *iliveup* campaign which both Rupee and Alison Hinds are a part of. Barbadian efforts at HIV/AIDS awareness have also increased with a host of artists participating in benefit concerts.

³⁹⁷ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 12.

Throughout the Caribbean there are various stereotypical ideas of “a life that is said to be typical in contracting the virus that causes AIDS,” including drug use and sexual promiscuity.³⁹⁸ In *My Brother*, Jamaica Kincaid details her familial experience with her younger brother who suffered and died from AIDS in Antigua. She explains how “This disease in Antigua, produces all the prejudices in people that it produces elsewhere, and so like many other places, the people afflicted with it and their families are ashamed to make their suffering known.”³⁹⁹ Such shame was physically foisted upon patients in hospitals who believed that since there was no cure for the disease, resources should not be spent on prolonging AIDS-inflicted lives, and placed patients “In that dirty room, other people before him had died of that same disease. It is where they put people who are suffering from the virus that causes AIDS...only people who tested positive for the AIDS virus were placed in that room in isolation.”⁴⁰⁰ Such shame is often internalized by those who suffer with the disease as Kincaid notes when she writes that her brother “could not say the words AIDS or HIV, he referred to his illness as stupidity (‘de chupidness’).”⁴⁰¹ The shame is magnified by the association between AIDS and homosexuality, which operates as an open secret in most Caribbean communities. Such a secret has varying levels of “openness” wherein some individuals are known to be homosexual but it is considered rude to discuss it if they do not speak on the issue. Others, as in the case of Kincaid’s brother, hide their sexual preferences even from family. Everyone knows that homosexuality exists in the Caribbean, but many people in Caribbean societies would rather not know.

Early AIDS activists in the Caribbean broke the silences surrounding the disease, and many also broke through the walls of the open secret of homosexuality. Kincaid reflects on a man named Freeston who

was and is, as far as [she] knows, the only person to publicly admit he was afflicted with the HIV virus; in making his situation public he hoped to perform a public service. He spoke on the radio, he appeared on television, he gave talks before groups of schoolchildren. It is perhaps because of the reaction to his publicly identifying himself as a person with AIDS that no one in Antigua will do this again.⁴⁰²

As a homosexual man in a society that did not discuss homosexuality afflicted with and speaking about a disease that few understood at the time in a culture that, according to Kincaid, did not deal with sickness, Freeston was ostracized more than ever before. In the Barbadian context Elroy Phillips was the first to publicly declare he had AIDS. Phillips is said to “not only give HIV/AIDS a face, he gave the infected a voice.”⁴⁰³ While Phillips had always been open with his family about his homosexuality, he was extremely hesitant to disclose his sickness when he was first infected. He eventually did go public in order to educate society about the disease. His memory was honored at the Elroy Phillips Centre, which until March of 2011, was the only live-in facility for people with the HIV/AIDS virus in Barbados. While the government closed the center “in keeping with its move from residential care to community care of those living with the

³⁹⁸ Kincaid, *My Brother*, 7.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁰³ Rollock, “The face of HIV/AIDS.”

disease,”⁴⁰⁴ many in Phillips’s family disagree with the move. His sister “thinks Barbados still has a long way to go in terms of the acceptance of persons living with HIV/AIDS.”⁴⁰⁵ Only months later, another gay Barbadian man publicly complained that an officer of a government-sponsored social agency was discriminating against him because of his status as a homosexual man with AIDS.⁴⁰⁶ Individual, government, and non-profit ventures to fight the stigma of AIDS in the Caribbean are still fighting an uphill battle, and some believe that “artistes, deejays, song-writers and producers are among the people ... [Barbados] should draw more heavily on to effectively spread the HIV message.”⁴⁰⁷ Efforts such as the Don’t Dis Me concert in Guyana are in keeping with this idea.

The perceived relationship between homosexuality and AIDS in Barbados, along with the silences around homophobia within much of the AIDS awareness programming, rests upon the complicated position that homosexuality holds within Barbadian performance. At the annual Party Monarch competition in 2009 a host of older performers took the stage before the contemporary competitors. One performer, Director, has built his performing persona around crossdressing in an ill-fitting red dress and wig. Performances such as his are not uncommon in Barbadian history wherein crossdressing and homosexual performance characters are more often than not presented as comical.⁴⁰⁸ Only an hour or so after Director left the stage, a slightly tipsy, shirtless photographer began to loudly berate a group of young men dancing nearby with taunts of “...kill a buller...these shirt-raising-up bullers,” before warning a young boy, “be careful there are bullers about.” The photographer was offended by what he perceived as the young men’s effeminacy, and read it as homosexuality by showing his homophobia and calling the young men “bullers,” a term used to denote those who engage in anal sex and usually used to reference gay men. The fact that the photographer himself was shirtless and dancing in much the same way had no bearing on his assessment of the young men. Similarly, the island’s thriving drag scene, growing numbers of male prostitutes, and history of gender-bending performance are often ignored by average Barbadians and at best tolerated as undesirable and unimportant segments of Barbadian society. The risk of AIDS, however, cannot be relegated to the realm of the unimportant and thus many AIDS awareness efforts seek to covertly distance the disease from homophobic stigma through silence.

As the song, “Woman,” does not mention AIDS lyrically it is important that Rupee share his story of how the disease took the lives of both of his parents. This establishes him as a man deeply affected by a heterosexual experience with the disease. He implores the audience to show love and compassion to those with AIDS accenting his message with an African diasporic performance standard of call and response asking his audience “if you believe in that let me hear you say Yeah Yeah.” Dedicating the song to his mother, Rupee keeps the atmosphere light by asking the crowd to say, “Hi Mummy” as he waves in the direction of the audience/sky. He explains: “My father as much as I loved him, he was a good man, but he gave my mother AIDS. And it was a reminder to me that the men of this earth aren’t taking care of our women the way we’re supposed to and we need to do something about it fast.” After the crowd roars with applause he continues: “If you love, protect, and respect de woman say Yeah Yeah.” His

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ “Gay Man Cries Foul.”

⁴⁰⁷ “Artistes best for HIV message.” This has in fact been the case, as more and more artists perform at benefit concerts dealing specifically with AIDS awareness on the island.

⁴⁰⁸ Crossdressing also has a long history throughout centuries of Carnival in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

personal experience with the disease (and thus his activism) is based on a heterosexual relationship. In performance moments such as these, Rupee walks a fine line between critiquing certain practices of masculinity and appealing to women.⁴⁰⁹

Rupee roots his critique of his father in love and celebration. Though critical of his father's actions, Rupee is careful not to distance himself from the man. He has a relationship with his father that is important to his understanding of his family's situation, his understanding of his father's generation, and his understanding of himself as a young man. Rupee's father was of a generation of Barbadian men who lived when the importance of virility to Barbadian masculinity played out in boasting and in very different forms of fatherhood. In his memoir, Barbadian journalist Cecil Foster notes how "Many of [his] friends were afraid of their fathers, whose main contact with them was to administer sound floggings."⁴¹⁰ Growing up in a fatherless home, his idea of fatherhood was the administration of discipline, protection, and child support known as a "cock tax."⁴¹¹ In the absence of his biological father who had started another family abroad, Foster looked to his aunt's boyfriend as a father figure because "he sounded just like what in [his] mind [he] figured a father would, the right mixture of concern and firm authoritative approach."⁴¹² For Cecil Foster, his aunt's boyfriend "showed [him] that men could be good, kind and selfless. He taught [him] that men can get angry without beating anyone, especially their loved ones."⁴¹³ On the other hand, Ezra Griffith explains what it was like to grow up in a Barbadian household with a father. He says, "I was a little boy with a father, and I am struck now by the full import of that observation. ... Having a father conferred distinct advantages in Barbadian society."⁴¹⁴

In dealing with AIDS as a family, Rupee's relation with his father became complicated. In a 2005 interview he elaborates:

My emotions were mixed because I had a very close relationship to my father too. I was in a funny position in that this was a man we loved; this was my father, but he had infected my mother. He was in the army so he would go to places like Brunei and Hong Kong and I would imagine being in those situations, away from home, you have sexual needs and with prostitutes in the area . . .⁴¹⁵

In dealing with AIDS as a family, Rupee was forced to see his father as a *man*, subject to all of the many things that defined his understanding of manhood. Ezra Griffith explains that in the Barbadian context, especially when one's father is or has been present in the household, for a son, "one's father could never be just a man."⁴¹⁶ A father who lived in the household served as a

⁴⁰⁹ His appeals to women are largely based on respect rather than sex, which ironically, according to his fans and to the artist himself, increases his sex appeal. The songs that explicitly comment on female bodies tend to focus on beauty, a woman's control of her body, and a man's respect of it. In loving, protecting, and respecting women, Rupee's expressions are not controlling or demanding, but still rooted in heteropatriarchy.

⁴¹⁰ Foster, *Island Wings*, 81.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 83. In *In the Castle of My Skin*, George Lamming makes similar connections. Using the boy characters he notes how discipline and child support are connected by explaining how, in the eyes of the young boys and their mothers, a man has no right to discipline a child he is not supporting.

⁴¹² Ibid., 301.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 116.

⁴¹⁴ Griffith, *I'm Your Father, Boy*, 16.

⁴¹⁵ Taylor, "Rupee: The Reluctant Romeo," 34.

⁴¹⁶ Griffith, *I'm Your Father, Boy*, 13.

supreme example of manhood. His biological ties coupled with his presence offered an often unspoken but clearly understood love that separated one's father from "regular" men.

The lens that Rupee saw his father through was also complicated by generational differences in the performance of manhood. Cecil Foster reflects on his own parents in his memoir: "My mother becomes genuinely emotional when she talks about missing her role as a nurturer. My father, true to his military training but more so still a victim of the Caribbean male tradition, suggests emotion is a luxury we cannot afford."⁴¹⁷ Foster's father came from a generation of Caribbean men who more often than not displayed strength through an absence of outward emotion. Griffith describes his father (of this same generation) as caring, loving, jovial, and respected, but not as emotional. His connections to his father came through his father's presence, his insistence on respect, and his supportive and formative actions that, although they were done out of affection, did not rely on an outward show of emotion. Rupee's father's voice is largely absent from his performances. His relationship with his father is part of the foundation of the performance, but it is performed through the perspective of a mother/son relation. Rupee's struggle to process his love for his parents, the severity of their infection, and the circumstances under which they were infected manifests in his performance style.

The tradition of Caribbean men's emotional silence in public is not what Rupee enacts in Georgetown, Guyana at the Don't Dis Me concert. While singing "Woman I'll Always Be There" Rupee is seated on a large stage with the crowd before him and a full band behind him making him appear smaller. There is nothing but a microphone and an acoustic guitar between Rupee and the thousands of fans before him. His seated posture displays vulnerability before such numbers, and his choice to begin this song alone with a few chords on an acoustic guitar creates a sense of intimacy before the band comes in. The story of the song, with lyrics such as "What they saw it was a human disguise . . . couldn't hear our inner cries" furthers the intimate relationship with his audience. His eyes are closed throughout the entire first verse and he gets visibly emotional throughout the performance. His emotion and artistry blend as he adlibs, bringing his message to the audience home with comments of "You gotta love people with HIV. I love them too. That's how we'll make it through, for real." Such a performance invites a very different intimacy than that found in the heterosexual temptation of a song like "Tempted to Touch." Here Rupee invites his audience into his personal story in order to bring public awareness to what used to be a private disease.

It is important to note that although this song still relies on a patriarchal model of man (even a young man/boy) as protector, it does not assert or aspire to control the central woman figure, but instead demonstrates the connectedness of man/woman and mother/son. Instead of performing a hypermasculinity based on domination, competition, and/or homophobia, in "Woman" Rupee's masculinity is based on an inner strength and an outward expression of love and protection of his mother. Such a performance shifts slightly from those of a previous generation of men. The testimonies of post-independence men "suggest a generational change in imaging and defining fatherhood into their lives. The social fathering of a few emerges at least as importantly as the biological fathering of many. Responsibilities to the family of origin persist, especially as sons to mothers, and not as an unfair burden."⁴¹⁸ Rupee's protection of his mother is seen as part of a masculine duty wherein protection of family and anyone else who may need it is a practice of masculinity. This is in fact one of the ways in which Rupee defines masculinity,

⁴¹⁷ Foster, *Island Wings*, 266.

⁴¹⁸ Barrow, "Caribbean Masculinity and Family," 356.

as “being a father who looks out for his child, and supports his child, and supports the mother of that child. Or a man who looks out for his family, a man who works honestly to put food on the table.”⁴¹⁹

With lyrics such as “Many nights we would sit down and cry/Tears from mine would be tears from your eye,” or “It’s not about the experience of revealing one’s innocence/ It’s about the air you breathe inside of me/ To all mankind, and to all them baby,” Rupee posits an emotional connection to his mother so strong it becomes physical. This is an intimate physicality that is emotional rather than sexual, confirming rather than controlling. Rupee contrasts this physicality with that between his mother and his father. He subtly critiques his father’s generation’s practices of masculinity by including the lyrics “How he used to love you/ How he used to treat you/ Said he’d never leave you/ How he used to beat you,” but he quickly returns to the theme of loving and supporting the woman of the story, his mother. In the song, Rupee and his mother cry each other’s tears and breathe each other’s air such that Rupee’s strength as a young man can be read as the inner strength of his mother, but it does not rely on the kind of violent physical display that his father (and many in his father’s generation) used.⁴²⁰

The song’s lyrics bring together different forms of physicality, emotion, and support within a family’s relationships, all of which are ultimately plagued by HIV/AIDS, a disease that goes unnamed in the song’s lyrics. Rupee’s performative offering to the fight against the disease is a musical translation of his dis-ease with the situation of watching his parents die. Such dis-ease is complicated by his positionality as a son, as a public performer, and as a young Barbadian man in a time when the meanings and performances of masculinity were noticeably shifting.⁴²¹ As Keith Nurse notes, masculinities have a power differential, and non-hegemonic masculinities are often represented as effeminate or infantile and have been historically racialized and sexualized.⁴²² With songs such as “Woman,” and especially within Rupee’s live performances of such songs, he presents a masculinity that is still rooted in hegemonic patriarchy, but relies on emotion and vulnerability in such a way that displays strength rather than effeminacy. Rupee offers himself as a young man unable to protect his family against AIDS, but able and willing to use their story as one means of protecting a larger population. Showing his fans how he has been affected is an effort to protect others. He performs an alternative masculinity that is different than misogynist, homophobic practices, but also different than the loss of control and “effeminacy” feared in those other practices.

Rupee is not the first Barbadian artist to address the AIDS pandemic. In 1988 calypsonian, The Mighty Gabby, released “The List” a satirical critique of the prevailing conversations surrounding AIDS at the time.⁴²³ By the late 1980s the disease was reaching pandemic proportions and the Caribbean region was hit hard. Reactions in Barbados were often voiced through what is arguably one of Barbados’s most common, prevalent, and long lasting social traditions: gossip. As one of the first calypsonians to comment, Gabby critiqued such gossip in a satirical song in which the topic of gossip is a mythic list of all of those on the island

⁴¹⁹ Clarke, interview with author.

⁴²⁰ Such a reading is further exemplified by Rupee’s tattoo, which he features in the liner notes of his 2001 album *Blame It on the Music*. The tattoo features a female angel praying and wrapped in text that reads “MY LIFE, STRENGTH, MY MOTHER.”

⁴²¹ Not long after this performance Rupee also became a father, a role that he has made public in interviews, facebook photos and occasionally on stage.

⁴²² Nurse, “Masculinities in Transition,” 8.

⁴²³ The song was released before any men had publicly declared a positive HIV/AIDS status on the island.

who have contracted HIV/AIDS. Gabby ridicules the rumors in true calypso fashion of picing placing prominent individuals including other calypsonians and himself on the mythic list.⁴²⁴ By pointing to the bacchanal that the rumors surrounding the disease had caused in a comical way, Gabby exposes the stigma that the rumors are creating while poking fun at the female gossips.⁴²⁵

Gabby's chorus "well what is this, what is this/ that cutting like razor blades/this is the list of the fellas that got the AIDS" addresses homophobia as an undertone within its satire. By focusing on "the fellas" in a time period when the disease was heavily associated with queer communities, in a homophobic country that focuses much more on queer men than queer women, Gabby challenges a masculinity that had (overtly and/or covertly) been predicated on homophobia. In his satire, homophobia becomes the fear of effeminacy, the fear that the husbands, sons and lovers of women are actually "she-shes." Such a fear is coupled with that of a health risk, further stigmatizing homosexual acts by painting them as a threat to national health.⁴²⁶ Gabby's satire, however, shows that it is the secretive nature of homosexual discourse in Barbados that is the real threat, while at the same time poking fun at those who feel threatened. By satirizing the gossip, he implies that the gossipers are not quite sure about their husbands/lovers heterosexuality, but, ironically, by placing himself on the list Gabby is able to comically assert that he is secure enough in his own heterosexual masculinity to mock it. Nearly thirty years later, Rupee's Don't Dis Me performance of "Woman" is emotional, personal, urgent, and anything but comical. It still addresses the issues of stigma, and, in some ways, critiques previous generations' performances of masculinity, but does so with very limited attention to homosexual communities or practices.

Such a silence in Rupee's performance is not necessarily indicative of public conversations of homosexuality and/or AIDS happening on the island. In the early 2000s homosexuality became visible in Barbados in ways previously unheard of. In 2001 the homosexual community formed UGLAAB (United Gays and Lesbian Against AIDS in Barbados), and that year also saw the first public gay marriage on the island.⁴²⁷ In 2003 there was a government proposal to decriminalize prostitution and "buggery."⁴²⁸ The proposal ultimately did not pass, but the conversation became very important including allusions to the supposed sanctity of Barbadian culture, national "morality," and the economic effects of the criminalization of specific sexual acts in a tourist economy.⁴²⁹ This period also saw the suggestion of passing out condoms in the island's penitentiary to stop the spread of AIDS in the inmate population.⁴³⁰ The suggestion was vehemently opposed with similar rhetoric of protecting the "morality" of the nation and the masculinity (still read as heterosexual) of the inmates, a protection that seemed to outweigh the health risk of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In this

⁴²⁴ For a more detailed account of The Might Gabby's gendered performances see Harewood, "Masquerade Performance."

⁴²⁵ Bacchanal refers to an intense feud or excitement. Bacchanal is used to describe both a party atmosphere and/or a fight, argument or conflict. Its use usually points to the fact that a situation has gotten or has the possibility of getting out of control.

⁴²⁶ See Harewood, "Calypso Masquerade Performance," 135

⁴²⁷ Harewood, "Calypso, Masquerade Performance," 156, 133.

⁴²⁸ Buggery or sodomy, is usually assumed to mean homosexuality in public discourses within Barbados. This is one way to vehemently condemn homosexual acts while being seemingly tolerant (to some degree) toward people who identify as homosexual. It may also be one reason homophobia in Barbados is directed more toward men than women.

⁴²⁹ Harewood, "Masquerade Performance," 203.

⁴³⁰ Bryant, "Barbados to Maintain Laws."

way the contagion of HIV/AIDS is both tied to and in competition with the “contagious” practices of homosexuality read as moral decay. The threat to national health presented by the spread of a pandemic disease is in competition with the threat of moral, social, and cultural “decay” presented by some of the efforts to fight it.

Rupee’s performance, however, addresses the issues of morality and health through using “woman” in the form of his mother as the central figure, rather than focusing on a competitive and/or homophobic masculinity. In this way he is able to evade public conversations of homosexuality by focusing on a responsibility to women. Even while showing his vulnerability, Rupee enacts a hyper-heterosexuality relying on parts of a patriarchal ideology while using the discourses of love and responsibility to offer a different (if only slightly) presentation of Barbadian masculinity. Rhoda Reddock writes that “the HIV/AIDS pandemic has provided the space to examine one of the most controversial and pivotal subjects related to masculinity construction – homophobia”⁴³¹; and Keith Nurse offers “It is suggested that homophobic responses to gay men are one of the means by which hegemonic masculinity polices the boundaries of a traditional male sex role and reinforces a strict heterosexual practice (Connell 1992). In this way, homophobia is one of the building blocks in the construction of masculinity.”⁴³² If the above statements are true, then what do we make of an artist who seeks to destigmatize the HIV/AIDS pandemic, but does so without either promoting or condemning homophobia?

By relying on a “love you all” aesthetic, Rupee is able to quell concerns of detrimental cultural contagion in ways not unlike the Jamaican state’s use of Bob Marley’s “One Love” image. The posthumous use of Marley’s image and “one love” in promoting the Jamaican nation-state and its tourist industry silenced the elements of rebellion within his image that bourgeois classes feared would spread the circulation of his music. Rupee’s use of a personal heterosexual story, rooted in familial love that is extended to “all,” silences the moral panic of openly engaging in queer discourses. In Marley’s example it is the rebellious, discontent communities within Jamaica (and the world) that are disidentified from his image by the Jamaican state’s use of it. In Rupee’s example it is the queer communities of Barbados (and the world) that are neatly silenced within his AIDS activism, while Rupee himself disidentifies with hegemonic pop star masculinity. Such disidentification allows Rupee to perform a masculinity that is not explicitly homophobic, sexually responsible in an age of sexually transmitted disease, and promoting of a national ideal of heterosexuality. He uses love not only as a transformative hermeneutic in the fight against AIDS and in his representation of the nation, but also as a way to play it “safe.” Such “safety” is still problematic. Rupee’s silence on queer issues limits the transformative power of his discourses of love.

“SO MANY OTHERS WANNA TAKE YOUR SPOT, YOU BETTER REALIZE WHAT YOU GOT”⁴³³

Tourists, they come in from near and far, to be where we are
I am a Bajan, I’m a Bajan

⁴³¹ Reddock, “Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Introduction,” xx.

⁴³² Nurse, “Masculinities in Transition,” 8.

⁴³³ Rupee, “She’s A Winner,” *Leave A Message*.

Bajans from London to NYC, you belong to we
I am a Bajan, I'm a Bajan

.....
I love my land. On my heart I put my hand
And pledge allegiance so trueeee. Barbados I love youuuuuuuuuuuuu.
Barbados is my home. No matter where I roam
Barbados is my home. Is my hooome⁴³⁴

In June of 2011 Rupee released what has since become known as Barbados's second national anthem, a mid-tempo celebration of all things Barbadian, "I Am a Bajan." In less than two months the song had touched people across the island and across the world winning Rupee the title of People's Monarch in the 2011 Crop Over competition, and winning the hearts of Barbadians.⁴³⁵ Online praise showed that neighboring Trinidadians and people as far as Iran were impressed with the song's heartfelt pride of nationhood. The song traveled across the airwaves and throughout cyberspace where comments of thanks abounded. Rupee responded in kind, thanking his audience and revealing his attitude that representing "de Rock" (Barbados) is a duty and a pleasure:

Rupert Clarke Lol...give thanks king...I appreciate the support bro...dun kno is a must tuh rep de rock!! For real boy!!⁴³⁶

Such an attitude (Rupee's need to represent) is not new, but is very explicit in Rupee's music. His performances of Bajan nationality and Bajan masculinity place this representation firmly within his technological, materialistic moment. Beginning with animated internet lingo (lol-laugh out loud), Rupee makes the connection between God, man, and duty, specifically a Bajan man's duty to represent the island. Addressing the fan as "king" shows respect while encouraging the man to connect with God, by giving thanks. This is the framework for the two main points of the post: 1) a thank you for supporting the work, and 2) the assertion that representing "is a must." Placed within the short format of a facebook post, Rupee uses technology to represent a different form of "mastery of all life." He both relinquishes control to God by giving thanks and masters a site of interaction that allows him to expand his world outside of the geographical borders of the nation and the physicality of his own travel. Responses such as this show how Rupee views the role of a public performer as a privileged position that carries national responsibilities.

The need to represent is heightened by the level of travel that has always been a part of Barbadian life. Those abroad (even those who claim other citizenships) often feel that representing Barbados is a part of asserting who they are in the wider world. Speaking of the 1950s, Ezra Griffith relates his own experiences with the Barbadian men he grew up with, and

⁴³⁴ Rupee, "I Am a Bajan."

⁴³⁵ See chapter two, pages 50-55. "I Am a Bajan" won over "Wow" by Mr. Dale an accomplished Bajan musician and two time Party Monarch. "Wow" features a driving rhythm under a fast-paced delivery of lyrics celebrating the dancing female body: "I never see nobody wukkin up like that, and that's a fact. you make me say Wow, wow, wow, wow/wow wow wow." While "I Am a Bajan" focuses on nationalism and "Wow" focuses on the female body, both include lyrics that posit Barbadian women's beauty as a national asset.

⁴³⁶ Rupee responding to a post of his "I Am a Bajan Song" Tuesday June 21, 2011 on facebook.

his observations of the way in which travel affected their assertions of identity. When speaking of his father Griffith asserts that even with his father's "self-imposed exile from an island he loved so much,"⁴³⁷ Griffith still understood how "that look in his eye translated total confidence in his assertion about Barbadians. Over the years, I never had the slightest doubt that he knew what it meant to be Barbadian."⁴³⁸ Adjusting to life in New York, Griffith saw the same thing in other Barbadian immigrant men, most notably the doctor: "He was serious about the business of representation, much like my father. These Barbadian men of that generation, particularly once they moved away from the island of their birth, seemed to feel pressure to play a special role and represent values and symbolic styles that they thought were important."⁴³⁹ This generational imperative to represent changes, rather than disappears, after independence. Although an important part of Barbadian identity and Barbadian history, the ability to travel is still a privilege. With such a privilege comes a responsibility to represent the nation. This sentiment is etched into the very idea of the nation as the Pledge of Allegiance ends with the words "...and do credit to my nation wherever I go."⁴⁴⁰

Though born abroad and spending much of his time elsewhere traveling and performing, Rupee firmly asserts "Barbados will always be home."⁴⁴¹ Though Rupee's travel (and that of other artists Gabby, Edwin Yearwood, Hal Linton, etc.) is similar to earlier generations in that it provides broader opportunities for employment than otherwise found on the island, it differs in that the specific line of work—public entertainment—provides a very public face for the nation in a moment when "travel" itself is redefined by various communications media. Their employment depends upon their publicity. Whereas the men Ezra Griffith writes of represented Barbados personally in their daily lives, performers such as Rupee have made such representation their profession. Rupee's success as a performer is inextricably linked to his role as a representative of Barbados and the wider Caribbean region. Presenting himself as a gentle, attractive, respectful Barbadian/Caribbean man distinguishes him from the "hard" masculinities of many of his contemporaries. Although often placed within the same cadre, Rupee is not Beeniemann, Sean Paul, Lil' Rick, or Peter Ram. As interviewer Amina Taylor asks: "Who could ask for the Caribbean to be represented with more talent and grace on the world stage? In Rupee the world will wake and see the different side to the Caribbean male."⁴⁴²

The song "I Am a Bajan" is one example of the ways in which Rupee celebrates and represents Barbados. While mentioning the local festivals such as Crop Over, the Jazz Festival, and Reggae on the Hill, he also recognizes Bajan femininity as a national asset by asserting that Barbados is "where de women look heaven sent." While lines like these and those that describe the island celebrate the nation's natural and cultural resources, Rupee also reminds Bajans that "Tourists come in from near and far to be where we are," and employs a sense of cultural performativity by singing "One peaceful loving society/ we're one family." The pride that undergirds this song is based in a genuine love for Barbados, a sense of duty as a musical artist, and an attempt to recreate or at the very least uphold an ideal cultural legacy for Barbados.

Rupee's comments on his contemporaries tend to focus on level of craft and the seriousness with which he takes the role of representative of the nation. One of his biggest

⁴³⁷ Griffith, *I'm Your Father, Boy*, 152.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁴⁰ See appendix for the full Pledge of Allegiance.

⁴⁴¹ www.thisisrupee.com blog (now defunct)

⁴⁴² Taylor, Amina, "Rupee: The Reluctant Romeo," 36.

critiques has to do with the way in which new technology has changed the production of music.⁴⁴³ While many a Bajan will boast of how modern and technologically current the nation is, Rupee notes the downside of some of these claims:

We all talk about technology and moving forward, but it seems as though with the forward movement of technology many elements of society have taken steps back, especially cultural ones, music being one of the ones at the forefront. Because when we examine today, any person with a laptop is basically a producer nowadays ... At one time Barbados was the musical powerhouse of the Caribbean. We were inspiring islands all throughout the Caribbean, even across the world, you know, territories across the world with our infectious music. Very well produced, very melodic, good musicianship.⁴⁴⁴

In Rupee's opinion, the advent of producing programs has allowed for a democraticization of the production of music without subsequent quality control.⁴⁴⁵ While many in the Barbadian music business continue to produce music that has been crafted, studied, and refined, there are just as many seeking to enter the musical arena with no intention of putting in the studied effort required of "good musicianship." Such a situation creates a problem at the level of radio. In 2000, Barbados instituted a regional content quota, requiring a quota for local music on the radios.⁴⁴⁶ More local music makes it to airwaves, but often it is produced by the same person who is deejaying creating a monotonous sound and stiling the growth of the Barbadian music scene.⁴⁴⁷ Unfortunately, when inexperienced musicians meet efforts of cultural protection such as the regional quota "there's no one telling these guys you know listen bruh, this is a good attempt but you need to work on your diction, you know work on your timing, inject a little more melody into it, watch your lyrical content because what you're singing about is pretty lewd."⁴⁴⁸ With laptop technology more people can make attempts at musical artistry, but not all of these newer artists approach the music with the sense of representation that was once inherent in the calypso/soca genre.

The concern over the standards of such cultural performances is rooted in the ideals of the independent nation-state. In moving from the colony of "Little England" to the independent nation-state of Barbados, a reputation/expectation of greatness prevailed. The motto "Pride and Industry" assumed that Barbados, its people, its culture, and all that would represent it would be something to be proud of. For the generations born around and after 1966, such pride, such sense of standards was assumed to be intrinsic to performing a national identity. In Foster's words, "Independence was supposed to be a gift to the young."⁴⁴⁹ He says, "We were to be the

⁴⁴³ I will focus briefly on the perceived quality of music. For a more detailed discussion of technology and the forms and structures of music and other cultural forms see Curwen Best's *The Politics of Caribbean Cyberculture*.

⁴⁴⁴ Clarke, interview with author.

⁴⁴⁵ Celebrated calypsonian The Mighty Gabby has recently expressed similar views. See "Fast Food Music."

⁴⁴⁶ Nurse, "Popular Culture," 337.

⁴⁴⁷ A satirical video hit the web in 2010 on this very subject. The video pokes fun at DJs who use their position to play music that they produced, and then collect all of the royalties. Throughout the depiction, text questions the actions of the DJ and provides statistical information on who has profited most from the regional quota and copyright laws (cropoverbarbados, "Dj Tricky Trick.")

⁴⁴⁸ Clarke, interview with author.

⁴⁴⁹ Foster, *Island Wings*, 158.

prototype of the new Caribbean men and women.”⁴⁵⁰ Rupee takes such sentiments seriously in his role of performer, applying them to both national representation and to a larger sense of duty:

At the end of the day I think musicians, artists, songwriters, poets. You are given musical talent for a reason, you know. And, I think you are somewhat of a messenger. You have the ability through your music or through whatever musical talent you have to change people’s lives, to influence them. It’s God given. And I think you have to use it wisely.⁴⁵¹

Such a sense of duty is tied to Rupee’s understanding of himself as a performer, and it is also tied to how he practices manhood. Rupee uses his role as a performer to enact the kind of masculinity that he wishes were more prevalent in the world: one in which men treat the women of the world respectfully, and one in which sexual relations are undertaken with a sense of responsibility. He enacts his understanding of his role through his performances on and off stage, in interviews, on the internet, and through his activism with HIV/AIDS organizations.

In May of 2010, at a ceremony hosted by the AIDS Foundation of Barbados Inc., Rupee announced that he would be launching the Soca For Life AIDS Foundation. In his announcement he declared that too many musicians were promoting a dangerous promiscuity, and not excluding himself from his own critique he said, “Music is my life. I honestly don’t think I am doing enough. But this is really my first step to [making] this happen.”⁴⁵² Rupee has posited a post-Crop Over performance where a number of performers would coalesce to support responsible sexuality and AIDS awareness. He is firm in his vision of such an event: “Entertainers in Barbados will come with all the HIV/AIDS paraphernalia. The entertainment and the quality and value of the entertainment will be absolutely positive. There will be no rude behaviour.”⁴⁵³ While firm in his vision, one could still question what exactly is “positive,” and what is “rude”? Will homosexuality be addressed or even tolerated in such venues, or is that a “negative” quality of Barbadian culture? Will homophobia be condoned, or is that characterized as “rude” behavior? What does “responsibility” look like?

Such activism coming from one of the nation’s more popular performers is a performative enactment of Barbadian culture. Rupee is, in Stuart Hall’s definition of the word, representing Barbados and the larger Caribbean—both presenting what he knows and enacting the kind of culture he wishes to see in the future. Such a culture is based on expressions of love and responsible sensuality. Rupee’s relative silence around homosexuality and homophobia serve to make invisible whole communities that may not fit an “ideal” vision of the Barbadian nation. But how does a performer represent national “truths” while also presenting a national “ideal”?

Rupee works through these questions through a neorhetoric of love. In dealing with his complicated relationship with his father, his attitudes toward homosexuality, his view of the “morality” of the nation, and his role in representing a generation of Caribbean men whose gift is independence, Rupee still struggles to live up to the “positive” image he has constructed. In a 2012 interview with the *Antigua Observer* he had this to say,

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁵¹ Clarke, interview with author.

⁴⁵² “Rupee to set up AIDS foundation.”

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

Before my mother and father died I was very homophobic. ... When my father died and he was in the hospital I went to his ward (and) while I was there, there was one guy in particular who was a homosexual and he was infected with the disease. He was a big fan and it turned me around. It made me mature, basically overnight. When my father died he was up when everyone else was sleeping and he heard my father cry out for me and told me what my father's last words were; I absolutely have no hatred or scorn for homosexuals. I'm a strong believer in God so naturally from a religious perspective I don't support homosexuality, but whoever chooses to love that lifestyle it's their choice."⁴⁵⁴

Expressing his earlier homophobia as immaturity, Rupee relates his complicated relationships through the interaction between him, a fan, and his father. In this exchange, Rupee offers a "mature" sense of sexuality. Coupled with his comments that "sex is a beautiful thing which should not be scorned or considered taboo, it should be practised 'carefully and respectfully,'" such maturity is founded upon respect for life and other human beings.⁴⁵⁵ Not only has he performed this message throughout Barbados and the Caribbean, but he has also joined UN efforts of HIV/AIDS awareness. In using his musical craft to deliver social messages Rupee also seeks to establish himself as a producer, loving, protecting, and respecting the music he loves by guiding younger artists in "good musicianship."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Ward, "Rupee Speaks Out."

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Five

“That Rihanna Reign Just Won’t Let Up”: Stardom and the Politics of Representation

On the 18th of December 2009 Rihanna released the video “Hard” from her fourth album, *Rated R*, to much acclaim from her fans. Featuring a military aesthetic with Rihanna as a fashion conscious authority figure, the video was gritty, dirty, and unabashedly sexual. *Rated R* was the first album Rihanna released after a very public domestic abuse incident, and it marked a drastic change in her image. “Hard” was one of the more successful singles from the album. The song and its accompanying visuals marked the struggle of a young woman who had clawed her way into the position as one of the most popular entertainers within the global market and perhaps the most well-known Barbadian in the world. The remote militaristic setting is suggestive of a secretive culture of violence and power, one in which Rihanna maneuvers comfortably while exerting an authoritative status. Lyrics such as “the baddest bitch in heels right here” assert a woman who is at the top of her game, and, even after a painfully public humiliation, has no intention of falling off. As fans fawned over the image of Rihanna wearing a Mickey Mouse helmet and ammunition laden shoulder pads while grinding on the gun of a pink tank, it became clear that even with a slight decline in record sales “that Rihanna reign just won’t let up.”⁴⁵⁷

“Hard” is a declaration of bravado in the face of pain. Rihanna’s video performance coupled with lyrics such as “tougher than a lion,” “I live where the sky ends,” and “no pain is forever,” mark a public reclamation of her performance personality only months after a photo of her bruised face was leaked to media outlets the world over. Like many who deal with pain, Rihanna had returned home after the incident of abuse. In healing she retreated into her Barbadian upbringing. She went to work, writing, expressing what she needed to get out, and fashioning an image that showed both pain and dignity enacting the Barbadian ideals of pride and industry. While the desert setting of the video is not at all reminiscent of the Barbadian landscape, the isolated setting can be read in the light of the fact that Rihanna’s level of success reached uncharted waters for a young female Barbadian. Much like the meeting of sky and sea her declaration of “I live where the sky ends” positions her as alone on the edge of the possible.

The image of Rihanna is where myths of the Caribbean meet global pop culture expectations of young and sexy. Most people, producers included, didn’t believe that Robyn Rihanna Fenty was the best singer, but what they did see in her was determination. Jay-Z explains: “When she came into the office I was like, ‘Whoa.’ She had this look in her eyes, this determination, that could just freeze a room.”⁴⁵⁸ Between that first audition and album number five, Rihanna had put in the work to reign as “Princess of Pop” or simply “Princess Ri Ri,” at least according to her fans and media headlines. In earning the right to “reign,” Rihanna has incurred the responsibility of representing the nation that birthed her—first through sheer coincidence of her celebrity and the fact that she was raised on an island whose national identity requires representation, and secondly through her 2008 acceptance of a cultural ambassadorship. To be Barbadian is to represent Barbados. To say the pledge of allegiance is to declare that one

⁴⁵⁷ Rihanna, “Hard,” *Rated R*.

⁴⁵⁸ Van Meter, “Living Out Loud,” 264.

will represent or “do credit to the nation wherever [one] may go.”⁴⁵⁹ And to accept a position as the island’s Cultural Ambassador to Youth is to acknowledge and embrace that representational responsibility.

This chapter argues that Rihanna embodies the ambiguity – with all of the possibilities and dangers – of performing a Barbadian national identity through a young female body and to a global audience of millions. As a pop star, Rihanna’s gleam sheds light on the nation of Barbados, but it also illuminates discourses of sexuality, drug use, cultural standards, and violence that many would wish to leave in the shadows. This is not to say that her audience automatically sees her homeland in her image, but that because of her celebrity many looking at Barbados for the first time do so through the lens of the most famous Barbadian. The global circulation of Rihanna’s image is both an asset and a liability to a nation that depends on a reputation of respectable release within a global tourist market. Rihanna’s sexuality, her spontaneity, and her youth are attractive to the Barbados Tourism Authority and to many of the citizens it serves, but Barbadian critiques of her reveal that she also represents segments of the nation’s youth that may not care very much to enact the ideal Barbados promoted in advertisements; or even worse enact the historical myths of the Caribbean complete with sexual overtones and promises of leisure far too well. Her success within the global pop market and the unassuming yet haughty way she handles it present an image of Barbadian pride and industry that her Barbadian supporters are proud of, but one that causes her Barbadian critics to bristle. Rihanna represents Barbados; not necessarily the national ideal, but all of the complicated discourses that surround it.

The relationship between Rihanna’s stardom and the nation’s reputation rests on the pride associated with being a Barbadian and the national expectations that those raised on the island will do their part to preserve and promote the nation. Rihanna’s public statements about her relation to her homeland have varied over the course of her career, but tend to focus on her Barbadian critics (often painting their criticism unfavorably as constitutive of Barbadian culture).⁴⁶⁰ In 2006 *SHECaribbean* magazine featured Rihanna in a cover article entitled “The Bajan Beyoncé.” When asked about “the backlash that invariably follows the acclaim,” Rihanna explained how she reorganized her social circle and excused her Barbadian critics with the following statement: “In Barbados we have this pride thing, people hate to give up compliments. It physically hurts them to say congratulations so they find it easier to be mean.”⁴⁶¹ In her representation of the island, the national motto, “Pride and Industry,” takes on a somewhat catty meaning. Barbadian pride becomes coldness, perhaps even tinged with jealousy.

Such a representation slightly contradicts the way Rihanna describes Barbados and Barbadian people. The article goes on to say:

She might be carrying a big responsibility on her young shoulders but Rihanna takes her role as the region’s unofficial female ambassador seriously. ... She can never say enough about her love for her island and the music that still drives the beat of her heart, despite her international success. “The people are so warm, you’ll find a few rude ones but I guess those sneak through wherever you go. The majority of Bajans are warm and

⁴⁵⁹ This is the last line of Barbados’s pledge of allegiance. See appendix.

⁴⁶⁰ Such depictions are common for many identities throughout the Caribbean, and are often subsumed under what ethnographer Peter Wilson called “crab antics.” Wilson, *Crab Antics*.

⁴⁶¹ Taylor, “The Bajan Beyoncé,” 65.

friendly. We love to welcome people from other countries, generally we cater to them well. We love to hang out, we love to party. Music is our love. We embrace music like reggae, hip hop, RnB. Soca and calypso are our cultural music but we Bajans love the full flavors of the Caribbean. ... It is such an honor to carry the torch for Barbados and the rest of the Caribbean. When I performed at the MTV Music Awards so many people had the Barbados flag and people back home saw that and were just so touched. The people at the Barbados Tourist Board saw that and were just so moved. They had never seen a Bajan artist represent on the international stage like that before which is amazing. Sometimes, when you have that kind of support you feel like you could take on the world.”⁴⁶²

Here Rihanna distinguishes Barbados as her homeland, but also places it within a pan-Caribbean culture open for consumption. In her depiction, Barbados loves and is part of “the full flavors of the Caribbean”; these flavors are attractive and available to visitors but can be bitter when coming in contact with each other. She says that Barbadians are “friendly” to tourists, but “mean” to each other. The “pride thing” noted just a few paragraphs before disappears. “Mean” people are just “a few rude ones,” but the bulk of Barbadians are painted as warm, friendly, and supportive of Rihanna’s success. Through Rihanna’s then eighteen-year old eyes, Barbados is not a site of industry or international trade, it is not a part of world history or a politically and economically stable postcolonial nation; it is a fun place to party, a place where tourists are welcomed and catered to. And she is proud to represent this place. Not only does she take it seriously, but Barbadian support becomes the foundation of her success, making her “feel like [she] can take on the world.”⁴⁶³

Her statements in this article betray her definitions of Barbadian culture and Barbadian pride, but they also betray how she defines her role as a representative. In describing her performance at the MTV music awards, Barbadians are not necessarily touched by Rihanna’s performance as much as they are by their own reactions to it. It is the Barbadian flags seen in the audience that move those back at home. Rihanna’s stage performance allows the space for the transnational performance of Barbadian identity. It enables those Barbadians in the U.S. to represent their nation through their support of her. And it creates the space for them to speak to their sistren and brethren in Barbados and to represent their nation to foreign audiences via the media coverage of Rihanna.

Six years and five albums later, Rihanna took a slightly different stance on her relationship to the nation of Barbados. When asked, she asserted her love for her nation. In the 2011 *Esquire* magazine article, “The Sexiest Woman Alive is Rihanna: Thank you Barbados,” she explains her earlier position:

Early in your career, you used the word *hate* a lot when describing the way the people of Barbados responded to your success.

I grew to realize that that hate was just pride. I realized that it’s a part of our culture. I’m always representing Barbados. All over the world, no matter what I was doing, no matter what I achieved, no matter what award it was, I always shouted them

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

out. So, I started making them feel like, 'This is our girl. If people in the UK could get this excited about her, what's wrong with us?

You're the most famous person in the history of your country.

*And I never turned my back, too.*⁴⁶⁴

Here Rihanna is still proud of Barbados. She still equates criticism or “hate” with Barbadian pride, and understands it as a part of the national culture. But her language places her both within and outside of that culture. It is “our” culture, but she shouts “them” out. Her comments here paint her as an alienated representative. She asserts that she is still connected to her home nation, but in her search to understand and explain the criticism that comes from that part of her audience she paints them as somewhat inadequate and self-reflective of that inadequacy by putting the words “what’s wrong with us” in the mouths of her Barbadian critics. Her success as a pop star has made her the most recognizable Barbadian in the nation’s history, but in interviews such as this one she glosses over the complexity of such a position, asserting her confidence in the form of “understanding” her critics. The conflicts between pop stardom and national representation are dismissed by subtly invoking a historical trope: the U.K. is great and Barbados should be like it. If Barbadians differ from U.K. tastes, then something is inherently wrong with Barbadians.

In the national symbols of Barbados one can discern a concerted effort to map the resources of an independent nation.⁴⁶⁵ The national crest features both the fishing and sugarcane industries. The flag’s colors represent the blue and gold of sky, sand, and sea. These latter resources are hard to export. As overfishing and debates over fishing rights plague the fishing industry and the sugar industry struggles to stay alive in the twenty-first century, successive post-independence Barbadian governments have invested in one of the most world-traveled and self-reproducing resources: its people. To be a Barbadian citizen is to be a representation of the nation, especially when abroad. The pledge of allegiance charges all Barbadians not only with the burden of national representation, but with representing the nation both as a modern nation-state and as a tropical island fantasy, the kind that idyllic myths are made of. Those who travel have the added burden of melding the nation’s models of paradise and modernity in contexts that make it difficult to relay the complexities of that relation. And for Barbadian international pop star, Rihanna, this burden of representation is entangled with her own individual celebrity.

Regardless of how she paints her relationship to her home nation, or how overt or covert references to Barbados are within her packaging, the trope of the idyllic Caribbean is represented through Rihanna’s public image. Even while auditioning for the record label that would launch her career she was “dressed to evoke the spirit of the Caribbean’s azure waters in a blue boob tube, white trousers and white boots.”⁴⁶⁶ Through her attire Rihanna signified the island’s most abundant natural resources (sky and sea) as she enacted her own role as a resource by stepping into the public eye. Her 2005 commercials for the Barbados Tourism Authority rely on the same idyllic tropes of presenting the island as an “exotic” place where foreigners can live out their luxurious fantasies. Using her body to signify, Rihanna continues a Barbadian discourse where women are viewed as both national resource and local spectacle.

⁴⁶⁴ McCammon, “The Sexiest Woman Alive,” 115. (italics in original)

⁴⁶⁵ See appendix for more details.

⁴⁶⁶ Taylor, “The Bajan Beyoncé,” 65.

This chapter is about the ways in which the image of Rihanna influences the image of the nation she came from. By working in the public eye Rihanna represents Barbados (specifically its youth); she represents popular culture and the market that it exists within; she represents a generation of young women; and she represents herself. Few would dispute the statement that Rihanna has become a pop star. Her image manifests across T.V., computer, and film screens around the world, not to mention print ads, musical advertisements, and digitally altered cosmetic products.⁴⁶⁷ But what does her stardom and the proliferation of her image do for Barbados as a nation?

In order to understand the relationship between this individual pop star and the Barbadian nation-state, one has to explore how Robyn Rihanna Fenty has moved beyond the level of stardom and into the realm of the iconic. As Vicki Goldberg notes in her study of American photography, icons have symbolic significance; “They concentrate the hopes and fears of millions and provide an instant and effortless connection to some deeply meaningful moment in history.”⁴⁶⁸ Rihanna’s image stands in for a Barbadian ideal, the image of modern tropicalism that the Barbadian nation-state has been crafting for decades. Her stardom has the power to spread the name (and perhaps influence) of Barbados further than previously imagined. She “is iconic in the commonly held sense of the term: a representative image of profound significance to a nation or larger group.”⁴⁶⁹ But what specifically does her iconicity do to and for the nation of Barbados?

She has (with the help of her Def Jam mentors, family and friends) built an artistic vision, molding the product of “Rihanna” over the years. This is the epitome of Rihanna’s image. It has been one of the most malleable in the contemporary pop culture market rivaling reinvention masters such as Madonna. In a 2011 interview, *British Vogue* writer, Christa D’Souza, writes that Rihanna is “not so much a “black Madonna” (what she wanted to be as a girl growing up in Barbados) as a real-life avatar for the twenty-first century.”⁴⁷⁰ Madonna’s manipulation of her image throughout her career had real effects on the construction of femininity within the pop market. Media studies scholar Lisa Taylor explains: “Her continual change of image across these early music and video outputs promoted the idea that female identity was a construct that could be orchestrated and manipulated at will.”⁴⁷¹ Rihanna’s career trajectory has successfully taken up the idea of feminine image as product as she has built her name as a brand, expanding beyond the music industry, and displaying a chameleon-like ability to refashion her public self. Like Madonna, Rihanna’s “success can thus be attributed to the successful marketing of image and the manipulation of the grand spectacle of her live concerts and music videos as opposed to any extraordinary talent as either a vocalist or dancer.”⁴⁷²

This chapter begins by detailing Rihanna’s whirlwind rise to stardom, her public negotiation of her own celebrity, and the ways in which she has become an icon. Such an analysis is important in detailing what is at stake in having a young female pop superstar as the most visible face of a nation within a global market. There are few images of Barbados that come close to rivaling the circulation of Rihanna’s image, giving little in the way of an alternative perspective. In the following section I look at Rihanna’s superstardom in the light of

⁴⁶⁷ See the discussion of the Nivea campaign in chapter six, pages 176-77.

⁴⁶⁸ Goldberg, *The Power of Photography*, 135.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁷⁰ D’Souza, “Rihanna Rocks,” 173.

⁴⁷¹ Taylor, “Baby I’m a Star,” 159.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 161.

Barbados's tourist economy and the ways in which the brand of Rihanna interfaces with brand Barbados before exploring the implications such representation has on the global pop culture market and those artists from small nation-states that are seeking entrance into it.

“HURRICANE”

Straight out the Caribbean sea, You know you gotta feel me
I'm a 1,2,3,4,5 category, and I'm so deadly
Come from the land of Barbados, And you know that I'm more dangerous

...
moving strong and fast, the industry's forecast

...
Hurricane it's the hurricane (hurricane hurricane),
Blowing holes right through your brain (straight through your brain)
Hurricane it's the hurricane Hurricane⁴⁷³

One day a sixteen year old Rihanna was an aspiring singer in a virtually unknown girl group on the small island of Barbados, and then in the presence of megaproducer Evan Rogers she sang a demo, batted her emerald eyes, and she was caught up in a hurricane of stardom landing at a table in New York City signing a record deal.⁴⁷⁴ Her vocals were still shaky, she was young and inexperienced, but as if she were a West Indian Dorothy clicking her heels all the Wizzes of Def Jam Records affirmed that she had all she needed to become a star.

From *Vogue* to *Esquire*, magazine after magazine tells the origin story of Rihanna's career—the teenage school girl who had the good luck to be seen by a big American record producer and was flown to New York in 2005 to audition for Def Jam executives Jay-Z and Jay Brown—a fairytale beginning. Fans and critics alike have noted that as a singer Rihanna doesn't have the best voice in the business, but what Def Jam producers saw in her was that “certain quality, easy to perceive but hard to define, possessed by abnormally interesting people. Call it ‘it.’”⁴⁷⁵ As a team they would produce a superstar, both mysterious and ordinary, whose “it”ness would only grow. What Rihanna brought to the table was a work ethic and “that countenance, the effortless look of public intimacy well known in actresses and models, but also common among high-visibility professionals of other kinds, is but one part, albeit an important one, of the multifaceted genius of It.”⁴⁷⁶ According to performance scholar Joseph Roach, these are the makings of a star. With the backing of the Def Jam label and producers with some of the best resumes in the business, a superstar was born. This star was built upon recognizable tropes of young girl pop stardom and exotic Caribbeanness backed by determination. Rihanna's fairytale path to becoming a superstar mirrors the kind of story the Barbadian nation has sought to write for itself in seeking to secure its place on the global stage working with limited resources, big dreams, and industriousness.

⁴⁷³ Rihanna feat. Rupee “Hurricane.”

⁴⁷⁴ Rogers has produced pop stars such as Christina Aguilera and Kelley Clarkson. He was vacationing with his Barbadian wife when he was introduced to Rihanna.

⁴⁷⁵ Roach, *It*, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

When Rihanna first appeared on the music scene in the U.S. most people in Barbados had never heard of her. That soon began to change. Her first year of stardom Rihanna shouted Barbados loud and clear in interviews, on awards shows, and in commercials. While Rihanna's target audience at that time was largely American teenage girls, most of whom had never heard of Barbados before, when her accolades reached the ears of fellow Barbadians she solidified her place as a (then still unofficial) cultural ambassador. By April of 2006, Barbados Tourism Authority officer Rob McChlery was telling a press conference that "Rihanna is currently the face of Barbados and the face of tourism authority out there and what is so interesting is that it is a young, clean, obviously very beautiful face. She has spoken well on television; she has done all of these interviews and she has talked about how good her country is. *Rihanna is Barbados.*"⁴⁷⁷ Her stardom furthered the reputation of Barbados in ways that few, if any, artists had before. McChlery went on to say, "What Rihanna has done is given freely of her time to us. Starting last December, all of our television commercials or 30 second pieces that ran all across America, all of our television commercials have had Rihanna in it."⁴⁷⁸ With tourism serving an overwhelming part of the Barbadian economy, commercials such as these play an important role in the economic survival of the nation.⁴⁷⁹

The commercials that McChlery speaks of, while serving the Barbadian nation-state, are geared toward a U.S. audience. They are full of visual imagery that satisfies North American aesthetics of leisurely escape. One such commercial begins showing the island's white sand beaches.⁴⁸⁰ The viewer is hurried through quick shots of white families running on the beach and being served by black waitstaff on the terrace of a hotel. There are shots of Barbados's famous golf courses, windsurfing, and secluded swimming coves. The latter part of the commercial focuses more on local-foreign interaction showing a party in the street, Barbadian children smiling into the camera, and a fisherman bringing in his catch near tourists diving from a boat. The camera shots move between bright sunlight, comfortable shade, and nighttime scenes. All of these images are interspersed with shots of Rihanna walking along a beach wantonly waving brightly colored fabric. She sings "If It's Loving That You Want," a song from her first album *Music of the Sun* that reappears as a remix on her second album *A Girl Like Me*. The thirty second commercial is strikingly family oriented although this is debatable as one watches young Rihanna wearing a bikini and sarong, enticing the camera while singing lyrics such as "If it's loving that you need baby come and share my world" and "If it's lovin that you need I got it right here baby."

The song, Rihanna, and the carefully crafted images all work in service of a state ideal that shows Barbados as desirable. The commercial builds on nostalgic tropes of the exotic and erotic Caribbean, while also highlighting the modern amenities of Barbados's tourism product. Rihanna's body and her music are dually inviting. As a young woman she is sexually desirable, but the lyrics "if it's loving that you want, I got it right here baby," both build on that sexuality and negate it by imploring tropes of the young West Indian au pair in an American audiences

⁴⁷⁷ Wilson, "Star Power." emphasis added.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Since the 1950s tourism has played an increasingly important role in the Barbadian economy. While in the 1980s information technology was one way for government to diversify the economy, tourism is still the most significant source of national income. (See Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels*.) Michael Howard reports that "by 2000, the Barbadian economy had become almost completely dependent on tourism and other services for its survival" (Howard, *Economic Development*, 75).

⁴⁸⁰ bestdestination. "Rihanna Promoting Barbados Tourism."

imagination. She becomes both exotic jezebel and safe mammy ready to love, protect, and guide a family through leisure. Using Rihanna's image in this way, the Barbados Tourism Authority offers Barbados as alluring, exotic, comfortable, and safe.

Rihanna's role in the commercial is effective precisely because of her status as a pop star. Her image at the time centered on youthful sensuality. Representations of the Caribbean within the tourist market (both historically and presently) also relied on an exotic sensuality. Rihanna is one of few Barbadian faces in the commercial not overtly servicing tourists. This is typical in a tourist commercial. The goal is to show tourists enjoying themselves; locals are only necessary to show a certain local charm. Lucky for the nation, one of the most popular stars in the pop market hails from Barbados, and willingly serves as a recognizable face for the North American tourist market. Her status as a pop star allows her to step into service of the nation by representing it in a commercial, but away from explicitly serving the foreigners within the commercial.

Within the first two years of her career Robyn Rihanna Fenty created a name for herself across the world. She reached beyond the music market entering into fashion, film, and entrepreneurship (revealing her own fragrance). As her star began to rise higher and higher in the pop culture sky, many in her audience began to pay more attention to her relationship to the island of Barbados. Critiques rolled in: Was she doing enough for the island? Did she exploit her roots in Barbados to further her own image? Supporters argued that she may never have won Tune of de Crop,⁴⁸¹ she may not wave the Barbadian flag in her videos, she may not have written any nationalistic songs, but Rihanna had found her own way of performing a sincere nationality. Aside from the tourism videos, she was able to bring in other Barbadian artists to sing on her second album.⁴⁸² And for her supporters at least, Rihanna's relationship was indicative of recent trends within Barbadian music. Rupee explains:

If you examine the type of music Rihanna does, you know, it isn't Caribbean. I mean, naturally because of her background, ... you hear mild references to the Bajan accent, but predominantly it's pop music. ... Now let me just reinforce that I don't have a problem with that. I love Rihanna like a lil sister, you know. But what scares me is that as I mentioned all the artists I just called [Shontelle, Jaicko, Hal Linton, Livvi Franc, Vita Chambers] they're not being signed for music that's indigenous to us.⁴⁸³

If most Barbadian musicians with prospects on the larger market were rarely performing "indigenous" Barbadian music, then how were they representing Barbadian culture?

While Rihanna's career took off, some of the editorials featured in Barbadian papers argued that with her level of visibility, the mere mention of Barbados from her lips would bring immeasurable publicity to the nation. Rihanna released five albums in as many years, all successful; but as Rihanna began to make drastic changes to her public image, debates around her representation of the nation changed. It was no longer an issue of whether or not she represented Barbados, but was she a "good" representative of the nation? Did she represent the

⁴⁸¹ Tune of the Crop is the song most played during Barbados's Kadooment Day, which is the Carnival Road March of the island's Crop Over Festival. Winners of Tune of de Crop are named Road Monarch. See chapter two, page 51.

⁴⁸² Dwayne Husbands sang on "Dem Haters" on the *A Girl Like Me* album.

⁴⁸³ Clarke, interview with author. At the time of the interview all of these Barbadian-born artists were signed to major U.S.-based record labels mainly in the genres of pop, rock, and neo-soul.

ideals of the nation? And as a young individual artist in a growing pop melee, should she be expected to adhere to Barbadian ideals?

Iconicity demands representation. When an individual becomes a symbol of a nation, the formation of her individual image is constantly in conversation with national identity formation. Caribbean historian and cultural theorist C.L.R. James reminds us that “artistic production is essentially individual and the artistic individual is above all, unpredictable.”⁴⁸⁴ Over the course of the first six years of her career Rihanna’s public image morphed multiple times, revealing the star to be one of the most visibly malleable public personas of her time. Her Barbadian citizenship defines her as a representation of the nation. Her publicity gives her iconic status, but she is both a Barbadian icon and a pop icon, and the stakes of representation differ widely between those two positions. Such relations are further complicated by the different aspects of Rihanna’s identity: she is Barbadian, she is a young woman, and she is also of a generation growing in an increasingly global world. A look at the early years of her career and her first five album covers reveals the malleability of her iconicity, as well her evolution as a young female artist.

As Rihanna’s popularity skyrocketed between 2005 and 2010, as she took more control over her public image, she also invited more scrutiny. Bombarded by bloggers critiquing her image, her body, her every move, Rihanna employed a practice that has roots in black American women’s communities—the practice of dissemblance. Historian Darlene Clark Hine defines dissemblance as “the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure, but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors.”⁴⁸⁵ In Hine’s analysis black women migrating to the Midwest used dissemblance in order to take control over their sexual and economic safety, while gaining a degree of personal autonomy. She states that “the dynamics of dissemblance involved creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining an enigma.”⁴⁸⁶ As a young female immigrant pop star in the U.S., Robyn Rihanna Fenty’s “oppressor” came in many forms: fame, media, and critics. Creating an enigmatic image early in her career was one way in which to protect Robyn from the visibility and scrutiny of Rihanna. The success of Rihanna’s career spread her image beyond national, genre-specific, and music industry borders. Even in constructing her image, she and her management could never control it. Especially after Chris Brown assaulted her in February 2009, her publicity became oppressive. No longer able to remain a mystery, the tactical practice of dissemblance has allowed Robyn Rihanna Fenty to hide within rather than from the limelight.

In 2009 Rihanna began to talk of giving her audience the “real” her. She began using twitter to talk directly to her fans. Posts on her facebook and official fan pages went from an impersonal third person voice to first person voice. She actively created “the appearance of openness,” but maintained an extremely fine line between declaring “the real Rihanna” online and in interviews and stating that much of what the public saw in her videos was “a character I play.”⁴⁸⁷ In creating “a character” while giving her audience the “real” thing, Rihanna has managed to recreate mystery even while appearing “open.” As acclaimed producer L.A. Reid put

⁴⁸⁴ James, “The Artist in the Caribbean,” 3.

⁴⁸⁵ Hine, “Rape and Black Women,” 380.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁴⁸⁷ Hill, “Rihanna Talks,” 324.

it, “She became a star before she became an adult. Her nature is to protect herself.”⁴⁸⁸ In this way, “opening up” to her audience has allowed her to exert some degree of power over the relationship between her public image and her private self—between Rihanna and Robyn.

Rihanna’s first album dropped in 2005. She entered a pop market that had a rather narrowly defined image for young black female artists. Her public persona was quite similar to those of Beyoncé, Christina Milian, Ashanti, and Ciara. The cover of Rihanna’s first album, *Music of the Sun*, presents her as young, fresh, and slightly alluring. The name of the album is dwarfed by both the direct head shot of Rihanna and her name in gold shining bubble letters. Backed with warm (almost sunrise) colors, her gaze is direct. The framing of the shot coupled with her makeup and bright bubble gum colored lip gloss, presents Rihanna wrapped in teenybopper glamour.

Music of the Sun introduced an unknown Barbadian singer into a U.S. market. Rihanna’s sartorial style reflects typical American teen R&B fashion on that album. Although released only a year later, Rihanna already had a considerable amount of name recognition by the time she released *A Girl Like Me*. This album and its packaging reflect an attempt to infuse elements of the Caribbean into the U.S. market. Utilizing musical collaborations with Barbadian Dwayne Husbands and Jamaican Sean Paul, *A Girl Like Me* relies on fusions of R&B and Caribbean based genres in its sound, without losing its pop appeal. Visually, the album packaging relies on prevalent notions of the Caribbean as inviting, alluring, pure, and fun by using tropical flora as backdrop, the contrast between white and warm colors in the color scheme, and the inviting but distant head shot on the cover. Both of these albums use the headshot to increase Rihanna’s “exotic” allure by focusing on her green eyes.

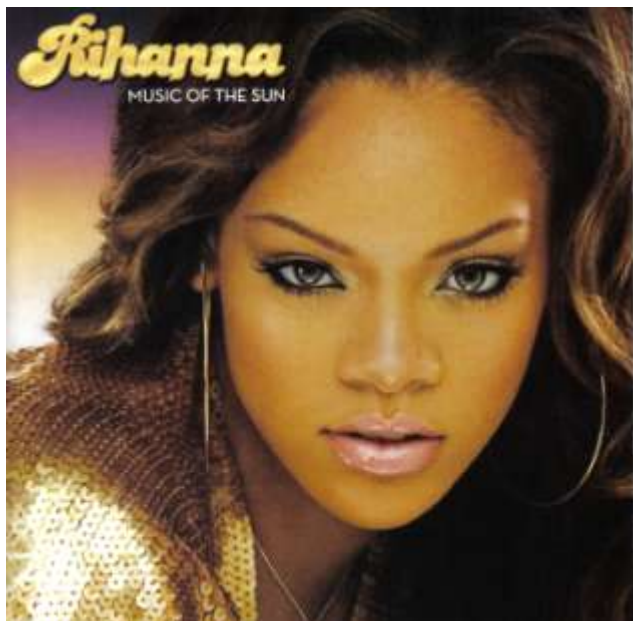


Figure 5.1

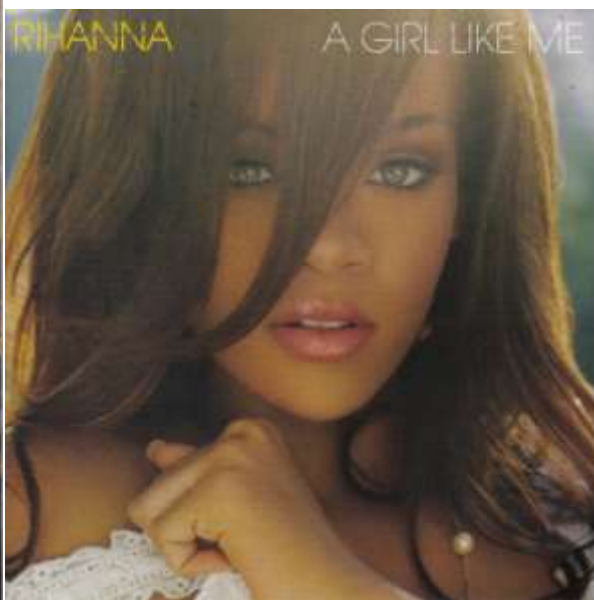


Figure 5.2

⁴⁸⁸ Van Meter, “Living Out Loud,” 260.

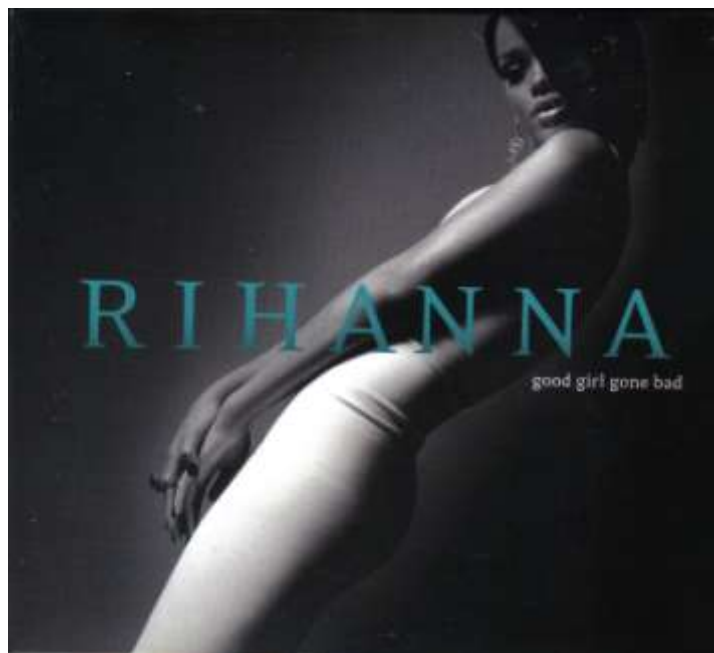


Figure 5.3

In 2006 Rihanna was only eighteen years old and her management team was still pushing a very youthful persona, but she was hoping to do more with her image. She explains in an interview with *Glamour* magazine: “In the beginning of my career, it was really strict for me...We had a young fan base, and they were trying to keep me fresh. But I just really wanted to be myself.”⁴⁸⁹ It was the 2007 album *Good Girl Gone Bad* that marked the first drastic shift in Rihanna’s image only three years since being discovered by producers Evan Rogers and Carl Sturken. Nineteen years old at the time of the album’s release, Rihanna had passed into legal adulthood and began to display this in her aesthetic. As the title suggests, the *Good Girl Gone Bad* album is where Rihanna breaks her earlier mold of bubble-gum teen “good girl.” Gone are the colors of her previous image. Gone are allusions to the Caribbean or to teen culture. This is a grown-up Rihanna. The backdrop of her world is now brick walls and satin bed sheets.⁴⁹⁰

She also begins to slowly move from the R&B genre into a more pop oriented sound. The album features collaborations with crooner/producers Ne-Yo and Justin Timberlake as well as mentor/rap star Jay-Z. Although her sound and her image no longer allude to the Caribbean, she did not entirely leave Barbados behind as three songs (including the title track “Good Girl Gone Bad” and one of the more popular singles “Shut Up and Drive”) were recorded in part at Barbadian studios. Selling over six million copies, this album solidified Rihanna’s stardom.⁴⁹¹

Rihanna’s first few albums created a “good girl” image with a level of pop glamour. *Good Girl Gone Bad* does not necessarily lose that aesthetic, but rather adds a bit of edge to it. In building an enigmatic persona she built on previous bad girl bombshell tropes, without entirely leaving behind a youthful aesthetic. One could ascribe Richard Dyer’s description of film star Lana Turner to Rihanna during this period: “The girl-next-door was that never-never sex

⁴⁸⁹ Hill, “Rihanna Talks,” 324.

⁴⁹⁰ The liner note images rely on these features as a backdrop.

⁴⁹¹ niriden, “Worldwide Album Sales.”

bombshell, plain-knit and voyeur's delight were one."⁴⁹² Such a coupling was already common in the market. Britney Spears, Christine Aguilera, and Beyoncé had all done this before as they grew from girls to women in public. Their enactment of the bombshell-good girl, however, lacked the kind of mystery that Rihanna created around her image in the first few years of her career. The sense of allure was aided by both Rihanna's Barbadian accent and her silence. Her silence invited mystery,⁴⁹³ but when she opened her mouth there was more than a good girl, more than a bombshell; there was a manner of speaking that was unfamiliar to many in her international audience. This sense of mystery would be both exposed and recreated with her fourth album.

The enigmatic charisma that surrounded her second and third albums disappeared with the 2009 release of *Rated R*. Rihanna explains how "it was important for me to grow. *Good Girl Gone Bad* was the first time I really took the reins in my career creatively. Then *Rated R* came right after that, and that's when I realized, OK, my fans love the music; now I need to get a little deep with them, get a little more vulnerable, open up."⁴⁹⁴ Such vulnerability was influenced largely by the media coverage of Chris Brown's 2009 assault on Rihanna. After photos of her bruised face were leaked to the press, she could no longer be a cool enigma. Robyn Fenty's personal business had become front page in ways that Rihanna could not control. But in "opening up" to her audience Rihanna could redefine her own personal freedom in light of the attack on her mystery. Beyond the trauma of assault, Robyn Rihanna Fenty had to manage the pain of publicity and maintain a career at a time when she "didn't want people looking at [her]," and "felt really lonely."⁴⁹⁵ After the assault she went home to Barbados. She regrouped. She began writing. In November of the same year she released the first single from the *Rated R* album entitled "Russian Roulette."

The individual and the pop star merged uncomfortably in this moment. Earlier Rihanna had promoted the island as a fun place for tourists to relax. In a moment of pain she did what most would do: she went home. Barbados was the place to be, both in her promotion of the island as a pop star and as a young woman seeking a retreat to the familiar. The sense of individual mystery she had cultivated disappeared when the images of her assault appeared in the media. The superstar "Rihanna" became an ordinary human. Losing the freedom of individual mystery, she retreated home to a place where her humanity could be refreshed by family and friends. It was also a place where she could remap her pop star image, emerging again from the sensual, idyllic Caribbean ideal.

If Rihanna stepped outside of the mold with *Good Girl Gone Bad*, she smashed it to pieces with *Rated R*. The album is dark. The cover is done in a sharply contrasting black and white color scheme. Her face is heavily made up with dark lipstick and eye makeup, and half obscured by her own hand, which is covered in hard metal jewelry. The simplicity of the nine rings and their small chains on the fingers that cover the right side of her face gives one a sense of tiny shackles. Her body is covered in a bulky black leather top. Her hair is dark at the root and shaven on one side, but the length of it is a platinum blond which mostly sweeps upward out of frame with only one lone lock dangling. The title of the album is almost hidden in the lower

⁴⁹² Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, 67.

⁴⁹³ See Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free*; Dove, "Canary."

⁴⁹⁴ Hill, "Rihanna Talks," 324.

⁴⁹⁵ Fenty, interview.

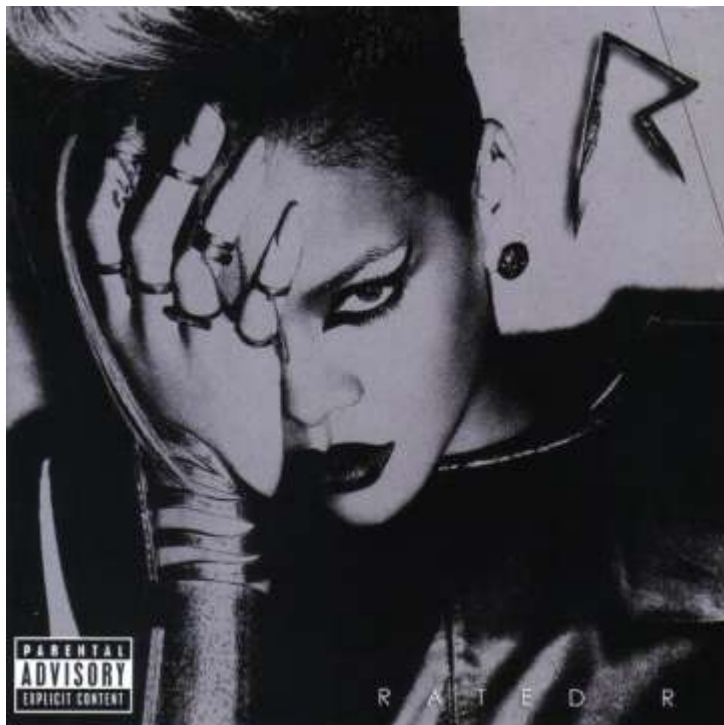


Figure 5.4

left corner, while for the first time in her career Rihanna's *Rated R* cover features a parental advisory. The viewer is no longer in teeny-bopper land. The images throughout the liner notes and the back cover continue the theme of the front. They feature Rihanna exposed: there are peeks into her creative process with shots of her writing and sleeping; a look at a "regular" life as she shops; and plenty of images of her smoking, smiling, just barely covering herself with leather, chains, barbed wire and comments on censorship that allude to discourses of bondage and sadomasochism.

The styling of this album fits with the kind of rock aesthetic that allows young angst to express unadulterated pain as a practice of healing. The rock elements continue in a collaboration with Guns n Roses guitarist Slash, and many of the aesthetic choices of the music. The visual imagery of the album is directed by children's book author turned "painter, filmmaker, set designer and brand visionary" Simon Henwood.⁴⁹⁶ Rihanna's team enlisted Henwood to be creative director of her global image including the album, videos, TV spots, and the logo which he created as a two-edged sword. Henwood explained to music blogger arjunwrites, "One side symbolizes strength and the other vulnerability."⁴⁹⁷ Such a contrast is evident in Rihanna's half-hidden direct gaze on the album cover.

On November 7, 2009 only weeks before the release of *Rated R*, Rihanna's first interview since the assault aired in full on ABC's news show *20/20*.⁴⁹⁸ Rihanna appeared before Diane Sawyer channeling Sharon Stone's character in the 1992 film *Basic Instinct*. Her look for the interview was strikingly similar to Stone's in the famous interrogation scene: blonde hair pulled

⁴⁹⁶ arjan, "Rihanna Works With Simon Henwood."

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Fenty, interview.

back, white dress, neutral colored lipstick and matching nail polish. In breaking her silence on domestic abuse so close to the release of her album, many in the public eye questioned Rihanna's motives and/or those of her management and corporate sponsorship. Throughout the interview and throughout the album Rihanna made it clear that she had no intentions of being anybody's victim.⁴⁹⁹ When questioned about her initial decision to go back to her abusive boyfriend after the incident Rihanna said, at first "I felt like I built this empire and the man that I love beat me and because I'm going back I'm gonna lose it? No."⁵⁰⁰ She goes on to say that in all of the mail and online discussion circling around her, it was the letters from young fans who were also in abusive relationships that solidified her decision to leave:

When I realized that my selfish decision for love could result in some young girl getting killed, I could not be easy with that part. I couldn't be held responsible for telling them to go back. ... I just didn't realize how much of an impact I had on these girls until that happened. It was a wake-up call a big wake up call for me.⁵⁰¹

Being forced to step away from her enigmatic image, and the violent way in which her private life was made public, showed Rihanna the stakes of her stardom in a way that she says she had not previously imagined. In trying to make a personal decision, Rihanna was confronted with her status within a global market. Her decisions (however personal she may wish them to be) influenced millions of others, and especially as a young woman whose image is tied to sexuality and abuse/pain, such decisions carry heavy weight.⁵⁰²

Rated R not only marked a drastic change in Rihanna's visual (and musical) aesthetic, it was also the first time Rihanna was listed in the writing credits for the majority of songs on one album, and, more importantly, as an executive producer. Rihanna made leaps of creative control during one of the most painful times of her young life. The image of the "real" Rihanna she proffered was one of a hurting, angry, and at twenty years old, still very young woman. Her overt allusions to Barbados had become quite scarce in her public persona by 2009, but in describing her hurt she alluded to a tropical childhood scarred by an addiction ridden father who was also abusive toward her mother.⁵⁰³ After her assault, looking for healing she went home to the beautiful waters and peaceful vibes of Barbados and she emerged head half-shaven, body exposed more than ever barely hidden in leather and chains, cigarette in hand, gun tattooed on her side and singing "I lick the gun when I'm done," "I'm such a fucking lady."⁵⁰⁴ If this violent, sexual, image is supposed to represent the "real" Rihanna as she proposed, if it was a chance for her to show her fans the depths of her personality, if that personality was formed on a small

⁴⁹⁹ Such a stance mirrors Farah Jasmine Griffin's reading of Billie Holiday. Griffin presents Holiday as the "kind of woman who is simply too complex to be contained by the tragic victim narrative that has predominated in even some of the most sophisticated representations of her life" (Griffin, *If You Can't be Free*, 7).

⁵⁰⁰ Fenty, interview.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid

⁵⁰² In the same interview, Dianne Sawyer asks Rihanna whether the decision to leave or stay was actually hers. There had been rumors that her corporate sponsors would not support her if she publicly stayed in an abusive relationship. Rihanna did not comment on the wishes of her sponsors except to say that if she were a corporate sponsor, she would not support such a move either. Only three years later, rumors and sightings of Rihanna and Chris Brown together suggest that her sentiments changed.

⁵⁰³ See Eells, "Queen of Pain," 45; Hill, "Rihanna Talks," 329; Long, "Forever Strong," 307; Fenty, interview; Van Meter, "Living Out Loud," 262.

⁵⁰⁴ Rihanna, "G4L," *Rated R*; Rihanna, "Wait Your Turn," *Rated R*.

island in the Caribbean, and if “Rihanna is Barbados” as Rob McChlery said, what did an album like *Rated R* say about Barbados?

Was Rihanna’s new image the “best” representation of Barbados? It was certainly the most visible image of a Barbadian (even if not the most visibly Barbadian image). Most critics acknowledged the pain in the album, and perhaps because of the way she and her team described it as deeply personal, many stayed silent on the album itself preferring to critique Rihanna’s changing public image; but others were troubled by the way in which Rihanna’s most public display of healing linked violence, sexuality, and “rude” behavior. Rihanna was not the first (and probably won’t be the last) young Barbadian artist to be critiqued for the sexual content of her music. Soca stalwarts Edwin Yearwood and Alison Hinds also contended with close scrutiny early in their careers and were “frequently accused of not setting the best example for their young fans to follow.”⁵⁰⁵ The concerns over the conspicuous sexuality and/or violence in the personas of Barbadian artists were part of a growing concern over the morality of Barbadian youth.

The 2011 *LOUD* album, Rihanna’s fifth, complicates the good girl gone bad image of her previous two efforts. Her attire steps back from the punk rock, sadomasochistic imagery of *Rated R*, returning to the frills, lace, and bouncing curls of earlier images, but in the super bright shade of her loud red hair. The cover features this bold coloring in a very tight head shot framed

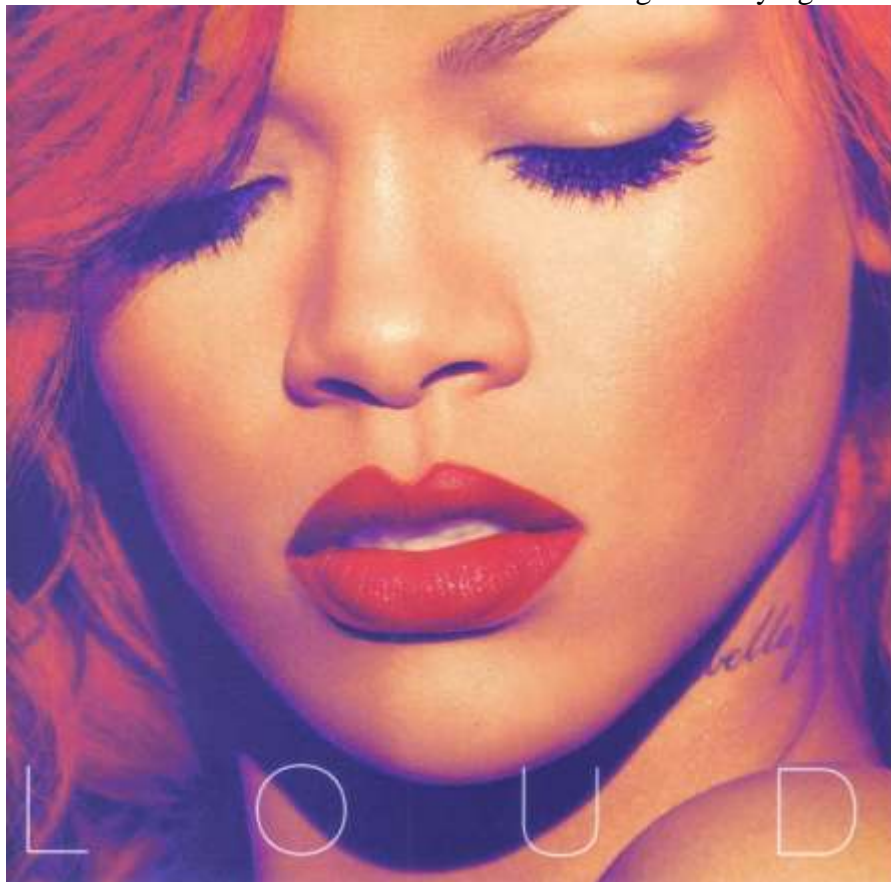


Figure 5.5

⁵⁰⁵ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 224.

by red curls and centrally positioning her barely open lips in matching bright red lipstick. While her face is positioned in the same direct pose as earlier albums, this time the viewer is held at a distance by her closed eyes. The liner note images combine many of the motifs of her previous albums including an image of Rihanna swirling in a white dress with her red hair contrasting with the greens of an outdoor setting, and close-up nearly nude body shots. This album's theme, however, seems to surround the image of a sexy flower.⁵⁰⁶ She lies in a bed of roses, kisses a rose stem, and holds one light pink rose between her seemingly naked thighs in an image reminiscent of the kind of not so veiled sexual statements made by Lady Saw and Betty Davis.⁵⁰⁷ The boldness of her red hair is both highlighted and washed out with bright lighting blending with her white clothing. The imagery presents a very delicate rebellion flowering in the public eye.

This fifth album shows Rihanna as both dangerous and fragile. While the flower motif presents less shock value than *Rated R*'s imagery, the lyrics and accompanying videos for the singles "S&M" and "Man Down" fulfilled the controversy quota of pop stardom. If the bans on these videos were not enough, reports of Rihanna's onstage antics during the LOUD tour helped to fuel the flames. Journalist Ricky Jordan offered his analysis of Rihanna's image:

Many of Rihanna's videos post-2008 feature a delicate contest between power and abuse. I think Rihanna is pushing the envelope by dabbling in areas that are designed to raise eyebrows and spark controversy: areas like suicide, lesbianism, violence against women, and media bashing. And she packages them with a thuglike coating of guns and chains under an umbrella of sex that simultaneously excites men, encourages women and makes children curious, while disgusting a minority. It works for her and for Def Jam.⁵⁰⁸

Rihanna's ever-changing image parallels the discourses about Barbadian youth, highlighting taboo subjects while polishing well-worn tropes. Jordan's analysis reminds Rihanna's audience that however her image represents the nation of Barbados, she is also an individual, and as a pop star, a commodity.

In the late 1980s and 1990s the effects of Barbados's shift to a tourist economy began to become apparent within a new generation of youth. The constant presence of tourists on the island raised expectations and desire for material goods as Barbadians were constantly in the presence of supposed leisure.⁵⁰⁹ The grandchildren of independence witnessed the signs of the unsustainability of the nation's free healthcare and free education when Barbados received an IMF loan in the early 1990s and then Prime Minister Owen Arthur stated that the nation must not restrict the sale of land, business, and/or foreign influence if the nation were to pay off its bills. More attention turned to the influx of popular culture that featured "glitzy" lifestyles, and by 2011 Steve Blackett, the Minister of Social Care and Community Development, was quoted as saying "The popular music culture and the adoption of bling and glitzy lifestyles have largely been responsible for the increase in social decay in our communities."⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Rihanna's grandmother used to call her a rebel flower. Her scent *Reb'l Fleur*, which was launched around the same time as the LOUD album, is named after the nickname.

⁵⁰⁷ See the covers of Lady Saw's *Passion*, and Betty Davis's *Nasty Gal*.

⁵⁰⁸ Jordan, "Rihanna pushing envelope."

⁵⁰⁹ Gmelch, *Behind the Smile*, 23.

⁵¹⁰ "Bling style taking over."

Such concern over the social “decay” of society and Barbadian youth in particular was voiced in part in response to the perception of rising crime rates of the past ten years.⁵¹¹ The early 2000s saw some of the most violent crimes those now living in Barbados had ever seen, most notably the 2010 robbery that ended in arson killing six people in the capital city of Bridgetown. The crime shocked the nation mainly because the young robbers had already gotten away with the merchandise when they decided to set a store on fire, trapping the inhabitants inside. Reports of the crime showed a grave concern over the young assailants’ lack of value for life. On the other hand the island has also seen a number of successful young entrepreneurs and university graduates. This is the generation of Barbadians that Rihanna comes from. It is a generation in which many young people have made great strides professionally, but others have fallen victim to the lack of jobs, rising cost of living, and “scabical” attitude toward life, ultimately creating victims of their own.⁵¹² Both Rihanna’s success and the somewhat troubling elements (violence/sexuality/gaudiness) of it are a reflection of the complexities her generation of Barbadians has faced.

Critiques of this generation often paint the “social decay” as outside of Barbadian culture. Many agree with Steve Blackett that troubling youth activities come from the influence of “foreign” popular music and its invasion on an idyllic somewhat nostalgic Barbadian cultural ideal. Being born and raised in Barbados, being inspired by and aspiring to a U.S. standard of pop stardom that she not only achieved but pushed the boundaries of, Rihanna’s image walks the very fine line between Barbadian “authenticity” and foreign imitation. Her collaborations with the likes of Kanye West, Jay-Z, and Eminem have not only furthered her mass appeal (and theirs), but built a tenuous bridge between foreign cultural influences and pride in the success of a Barbadian artist. In 2005 a fairly unknown mixtape titled *This is Rihanna* reached the airwaves featuring a collaboration with another well-known Barbadian artist, Rupee. Relatively few people heard the song “Hurricane” in 2005, but millions now know what it looks like to come “straight out the Caribbean sea” and become “the industry’s forecast.”⁵¹³ While most Barbadians acknowledge that Rihanna’s success has brought more attention to the nation, some wonder what effect her “hurricane” of stardom might have on the Barbadian public. Will it bring the individual and everyone in her path to a better place (such as Dorothy’s tornado arrival and subsequent journey in the Wizard of Oz); or is it possible that the packaging of this pop idol contains the destructive force hurricanes are known for?

BRANDED BEAUTIFUL: BRAND RIHANNA MEETS BRAND BARBADOS

“It’s not the music industry anymore,” says manager Jay Brown, “It’s the entertainment industry. The goal is not just to be an artist, it’s to be a brand.”⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ In 2010, *Nation News* released articles about the decrease in crime in Barbados (“New Crime Culture”) and the perception of a more aggressive culture on the island (“Too Much Violence”). A year later crime rates had slightly increased (“Crime Rates Increased”).

⁵¹² “Scabical” is a Barbadian colloquialism denoting behavior that is slutty, careless, and (sexually) irresponsible.

⁵¹³ Rihanna feat. Rupee, “Hurricane.”

⁵¹⁴ Eells, “Queen of Pain,” 80.

In the twenty-first century, the Barbadian nation-state is heavily invested in an ideal for the island that marries the respectability and modernity of “Little England” with the pride of independence and the exotic tropical fantasies of the Caribbean that many paying visitors expect. Sociologist Mimi Sheller details the ways in which “the Caribbean has been repeatedly imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise in which the land, plants, resources, bodies, and cultures of its inhabitants are open to be invaded, occupied, bought, moved, used, viewed, and consumed in various ways.”⁵¹⁵ In short, it has become “an object of desire in popular cultures of consumption.”⁵¹⁶

Robyn Rihanna Fenty’s career rests on these two foundations, desire and consumption. Her 2005 tourism commercials for Barbados promote the mythical image of the Caribbean as desirable and consumable, while her image as a pop star branching into fashion, film, and entrepreneurship relies largely on a commodified sexuality. Robyn Fenty embodies the brand of Rihanna. How can a nation benefit from the international celebrity of one of its citizens? What are the risks to the national identity and the nation’s tourist economy when it is linked to the global celebrity market? Using Rihanna’s August 2011 LOUD tour concert in Barbados and the subsequent discourses in print and online media around it this section shows the delicate relationship between nationalism and celebrity. I argue that the relationship between Barbados and Rihanna highlights the differences between the construction of a national brand name and a celebrity empire; that such differences expose the insecurities of a nation-state still seeking to make a name for itself within the global market; and that despite the differences it is quite hard for a nation-state to divorce such celebrity focused attention from an ideal national image.

International stars are very rarely made in places like Barbados; a nation whose impact on world history, economics, and culture is often subsumed by its ongoing struggle to define its national identity on the world stage; a nation that has both embraced and rejected its role as “Little England,” as “English rustics in black skin,”⁵¹⁷ the tropical version of British civility; and that in the last fifty years still tries to assert, reclaim, and create a reputation as more than mimics of their former colonizers, their Caribbean neighbors, or the North Americans whose tourist dollars sustain its economy. Rihanna, however, has managed to define herself globally. Her public image is bold, ambiguous, often controversial, and above all else, ever-changing, as she has grown from teenager to young woman in the public eye. Rihanna has incurred the responsibility of representing the nation that birthed her—first through sheer coincidence of her celebrity and the fact that she was raised on an island whose national identity requires representation, and secondly through her 2008 acceptance of a cultural ambassadorship.

Barbados, too, has grown in the nearly five decades since its independence. The nation-state draws on various models, mainly those of the idyllic island paradise and the modern nation-state. It is no longer “Little England” (though traces of that identity are still relevant), and even as it increases its efforts in tourism, many of its citizens are also careful to remind the world that Barbados is more than a holiday destination. Even within global economic crises, the nation seeks not only to maintain itself, but to push forward and imagine a prosperous future, constantly looking for ways to enact the national motto of “Pride and Industry.”

Identity formation within the region has had to contend with the image of the Caribbean as a commodity. Part of the pride of being Barbadian lies in the island’s reputation as a

⁵¹⁵ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 13.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹⁷ Greenfield, *English Rustics*.

beautiful, relaxing, desirable place to be. Such a reputation, coupled with a tourist economy, presents a struggle for control over the national identity as it becomes tied to an image easily owned by others. Jean Comaroff writes that “in a commodity culture, identity is something owned *apart* from one’s self, something that must be continually ‘put on’ and displayed.”⁵¹⁸ Cultural critics today believe that identity is more than some deep essence of who one is. It is also how people chose to outwardly represent themselves. Such representation will always be unsettled when it pertains to a collective identity such as nationality. The relationship between the classed, gendered, racial, and sexual fissures of Barbadian citizens and the “official” nation-state ideal is one instance in which the complexity of identity politics and representation rears its head. One way in which the state (and private actors) has dealt with this complexity is to shy away from the language of identity politics and use the language of commodity.

The 1960s political push toward independence in Barbados occurred simultaneously with an economic push toward service industries, mainly tourism. Since then cultural identity has played an increasingly important role within national discourse which shifted discussions of culture to structures of cultural industry.⁵¹⁹ Over the past fifty years conversations of promoting and preserving Barbadian culture became inebriated with an elixiric term: “brand Barbados.” This was one way for the state to circumnavigate the question of “who are we as a nation?” by framing it as “what are we selling?” This is but one attempt to objectify the cultural capital of the nation in order to transform it into economic capital.⁵²⁰ The “brand Barbados” discourse also mediates the tensions between an idyllic historical ideal and assertions of modernity by relying on the two concepts that make the national motto: pride and industry. Within this discourse, anything branded as Barbadian should hold a standard of excellence, should be something that Barbadians can be proud of, and whether it be the craft of local art or the “modern” pop music industry it should reflect a serious work ethic. Pride and industry becomes the foundation for the “brand Barbados” ideal.

The creation a Caribbean ideal often relies on the visualization of a tropical paradise. The physical and social landscape of Barbados and much of the Caribbean has been constructed, in part, for consumption since the colonial tourism of the 1880s. Art historian Krista Thompson notes the tropicalization of the region: “tropicalization delineates how certain ideals and expectations of the tropics informed the creation of place-images in some Anglophone Caribbean islands.”⁵²¹ Thompson’s work shows how tourist expectations affected the cultivation of island landscapes. Often such expectations walked a careful line between a primitive paradise and modern amenities, one such example being the American owned Marine Hotel in Barbados which featured “Cannibal Canal” in the first years of the twentieth century: “The hotel staff were employed to enact the part of cannibals in this recreated jungle landscape. Cannibal Canal offered travelers a controlled tropical environment, with both nature and human behaviors ordered, on an island that was devoid of jungles.”⁵²² Such control continued with the advent of commercial photography and tourist postcards. Not only did the populations of the Caribbean contend with finding images of themselves reproduced without permission on store shelves, but the form itself domesticated Caribbean landscapes by making them picturesque and easily

⁵¹⁸ Comaroff, “The Empire’s Old Clothes,” 21.

⁵¹⁹ See Harewood, “Policy and Performance.”

⁵²⁰ Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” 50.

⁵²¹ Thompson, *Eye for the Tropics*, 5.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 154.

possessible.⁵²³ The sale of a tourism product became inextricably tied to a commodified image. Post-independence Barbadians still negotiate between the two. The pride and industry of the national motto is rooted in a modern identity that seeks to wrest its image away from “primitivism” without losing a sense of tropicality.

On an island where over ninety percent of the population is of African descent, this negotiation is a search to define a sense of modern blackness. Deborah Thomas defines modern blackness in the Jamaican context as “urban, migratory, based in youth-oriented popular culture and influenced by African American popular style, individualistic, radically consumerist, and ghetto feminist.”⁵²⁴ Her definition is based on a Jamaican model whereby a creole-middle class proffered a national ideal at independence, but black urban youth offered their own ideal, which by the 1990s had come to symbolize Jamaican particularity within a global context.

Barbados has a similar history with a few key differences. The independent ideal always included working class culture. It was a means to distinguish an independent Barbados from the cultural hegemony of its English colonizer. But the independent ideal was still very much concerned with a sense of middle-class respectability, one that has never clearly been defined. Independence came to Barbados in the midst of an economic shift from monocrop agriculture to a service oriented economy. The relationship between Barbados and its Caribbean neighbors has wavered between regional cooperation and cultural and economic competition especially with the rise of tourism in the region. As a large English-speaking island with an identifiable cultural export (reggae), Jamaica has been one of Barbados’s main allies and competitors. Its cultural influence on the region and the global image of the region is powerful. In asserting an ideal independent identity and a building a national brand within a global economy, Barbados is hoping to maintain the particularities of Barbadian culture amidst Jamaican influences, and historical myths of the Caribbean. Barbados’s heavy reliance on service industries to attract foreign investment in the economy has meant that one of the main projects of the independent nation has been to set and maintain its own cultural standards.

The conversation of standards is intrinsic to defining the identity of the nation. The motto of pride and industry is more than mere words, but it is difficult to collectively agree on what Barbadians should be proud about. The cultural arena, with all of its hybridity and its centrality in Barbados’s tourist market, is where many of these discourses occur. In speaking of calypso and soca music specifically, and Barbadian musical artists more generally, acclaimed calypsonian Red Plastic Bag notes how “in everything you must have standards. I believe so strongly. You need to have standards . . . We need to look at what we are producing, the quality of what we are producing, be it reggae, rap, pop, whatever. We need to look at what we are producing overall: the quality of sound, the quality of content, and our approach to topics and so on. I think that these things are important.”⁵²⁵ The standards set by Barbadian audiences may not translate to the demands of the global pop market, or the aspirations of an individual performer.

The dilemma of cultural standards has reared its head many times in regard to Rihanna’s music. In 2011 one of the many songs at the heart of this debate was “Rude Boy,” a reggae song on Rihanna’s *Rated R* album. “Rude” culture (most often associated with the youth of the Jamaican working class) features overt sexuality, often violence, conspicuous consumption, and generally flouts middle-class and elite standards of “acceptable” behavior. It is a prime example

⁵²³ Ibid., 256.

⁵²⁴ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 241.

⁵²⁵ Wiltshire, interview.

of what Paul Gilroy calls a counter-culture of modernity.⁵²⁶ Barbadian Magistrate Ian Weekes spoke out against Rihanna's "Rude Boy" song saying that it was "purely sexual," and emblematic of music that promoted a "rude" subculture on the island. According to him "certain standards need to be set," but who is to draw those lines?⁵²⁷ Over the past twenty years there has been a fear in Barbados that a rude subculture could come to represent the nation in the same way that it came to represent Jamaica, thus threatening Barbadian respectability and perhaps tarnishing brand Barbados. In debates over whether or not to ban this song on Barbadian airwaves (and others within Rihanna's oeuvre), supporters of a ban seem to argue that such "rude" or detrimental music is not a part of Barbadian culture (or at least Barbadian ideals).⁵²⁸ Others suggest that the nation needs to support "its own," especially a Barbadian artist who is getting so much acclaim abroad. The argument over standards seems to fall between the cracks of what is a Barbadian standard, what is a global pop standard, and which should take precedence in a nation's expectations of a global pop artist who is Barbadian.

When Rihanna first signed with Def Jam records in 2005 she became the "face of Barbados."⁵²⁹ In subsequent years she worked more toward developing her own individual star quality, but the association (or expectations of an association) between her and the island would only grow. It was in 2008 when then Prime Minister David Thompson appointed her Cultural Ambassador for Youth and Culture that her public connection to the Barbadian nation-state was cemented (to the applause of some and the chagrin of others). And in 2011, when Rihanna signed a three-year deal with the Barbados Tourism Authority (BTA) to promote Barbados exclusively, the nation reined its (arguably) biggest global asset into national service once again. This deal was signed during Rihanna's 2011 LOUD Tour, which was quickly slated to make an appearance on the island. Brand Rihanna would meet brand Barbados.

Shortly after inking the three-year deal with the Barbados Tourism Authority, Rihanna shocked many with a surprise appearance at one of Barbados's most visible performances of national culture, Kadooment, only days before her scheduled performance on the island.

Kadooment is a Carnival road march that occurs as one of the last events of Barbados's Crop Over Festival. It is held on the first Monday of August. Participants are organized into bands, and each band has one or two costumes representing it. As thousands of people danced through the streets in costumed bands, participants, observers, and photographers spotted Robyn Rihanna Fenty smiling, drinking, dancing, and generally "gettin' on bad" like most everyone else. It was the first time Rihanna had participated in Kadooment since she left the island to become a star. Photographs of the "Pop Princess" and "Soca Queen" Alison Hinds appeared on the internet, as did photos of Rihanna and Rupee, but the photos that received the most attention were those of Rihanna in a Kadooment band costume. It was these photos of Rihanna dancing with friends, on a truck, and throughout the streets that the international media seemed to have a field day with.

One online magazine reported, "Rihanna goes back to her rude girl ways getting raunchy as a

⁵²⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

⁵²⁷ Ward, "Too Rude."

⁵²⁸ Even within rhetoric of Caribbean unity, dancehall culture is seen as a Jamaican and thus a "foreign" (often troubling) influence in Barbados.

⁵²⁹ according to Barbados Tourism Authority officer Rob McChlery. See Wilson, "Star Power."



Figure 5.6



Figure 5.7



Figure 5.8



Figure 5.9
Rihanna on stage during her LOUD tour

scantly-clad carnival queen.”⁵³⁰ While Rihanna’s presence was duly noted at the festival she was one of thousands of participants, not the “Carnival Queen.”⁵³¹ The same article goes on to note her “raunchy moves” as she danced “with a willing fan.” The “raunchy moves” are a common part of the national dance, wukking up, and the “willing fan” happened to be one of her closest friends, Negus Sealy.⁵³²

Many online articles framed Rihanna’s behavior as part of her growing wildness, comparing her Kadooment costume to those she wears on stage, and marking her dancing as shocking and disgusting. These reports by and large stemmed from celebrity news sites whose focus was strictly on Rihanna, but whose reports extended her behavior (and their critiques of it) to a nation of people. While comments on Rihanna’s “skimpy” attire floated in cyberspace, fans (and non-fans) sought to correct misinformed media reports in an effort to protect both Rihanna and the festival where she was photographed. In this way, critiques of Rihanna brought on by her status as a celebrity, caused the indignation of Barbadians who were furious that their culture could be grossly misread through uninformed readings of one young woman’s body.

⁵³⁰ “Well That Didn’t Last.”

⁵³¹ While the title of queen has many usages within Caribbean culture and within Carnival culture worldwide, in the context of Barbados’s Crop Over, the title of Carnival Queen is reserved for the most productive female cane cutter of the season who is crowned at the opening of the festival known as the ceremonial cutting of the canes. The 2011 Queen of the Crop was Judy Cumberbatch. See www.barbados.org/cropover.

⁵³² “No Tying Ri Ri down.”

One report in particular sparked the ire of many. Before the sun had set on Kadooment Day in Barbados, E Online posted a short article titled “Which Singer Is Rocking a Teeny Bikini and Feathers?”⁵³³ Before revealing the identity of the singer, the article cautions readers that “It’s not surprising to see her in such a getup, because one thing she’s definitely famous for is her sense of edgy fashion.”⁵³⁴ Here a costume common to the Crop Over festival and similar Carnival celebrations worldwide is attributed to the fashion sense of one individual among the many who wore the same thing but were often cropped out of photos. The article states that Rihanna had “returned to her native land of Barbados for the colorful street bash celebrating the annual Kadooment [sic] Day parade, where she was the Carnival Queen.”⁵³⁵ Besides misspelling the name of the event and (again) wrongfully giving Rihanna the title of Carnival Queen, the language of the statement has overtones of exoticism that continue in the remarks found most offensive to commenters:

So what the heck is Kadooment [sic] Day?

It’s an ancient tradition and public holiday in Barbados, which involves people masquerading in costumes that consist of natural materials and takes place during the Crop Over Festival. The event rejoices the end of the sugar cane crop harvest and acknowledges the crop sacrifices made to the gods for good luck.

Ri-Ri was spotted shaking her booty (Get it, girl!) with friends and (we can assume) wowing those around her with a barely there costume.⁵³⁶

Arguably, the “ancient”ness of the tradition is another editorial invention as Kadooment Day began as part of the contemporary Crop Over Festival in 1974.⁵³⁷ Next to photos of Rihanna wearing a bikini made of synthetic materials and decorated with fake feathers and plastic beads, the idea that Kadooment costumes are supposed to consist of “natural materials” comes off as an attempt to primitivize the festival by inventing a connection between the participants’ bodies and “nature.” The assumption author, Bruna Nessif, makes that Rihanna’s costume stands out in the crowd erases the rest of the Baje International band wearing the same costume, and the thousands of other participants wearing similar attire. Many Barbadians reading the article wondered why they had never heard of the “crop sacrifices made to the gods for good luck,”⁵³⁸ but most recognized they had never heard of such a tradition because it did not exist in the contemporary form of Crop Over.

About an hour after the article was posted online the comments began to pour in including statements on the beauty of Rihanna’s body, disgust at the public display of her body, support of Carnival celebrations around the world, and most notably corrections of the article and others’ comments on it. Throughout the 125 comments posted to the article within the week, certain attitudes became quite clear. One of the clearest was self-identified Barbadians feeling misrepresented, defending the modernity of their culture, defending Rihanna, and declaring their

⁵³³ Nessif, “Which Singer.”

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ I say arguably because the Crop Over festival (and Kadooment) has roots on seventeenth and eighteenth century Barbadian plantations, though in drastically different form, and it is part of a world-wide Carnival tradition also drawing on European, New-World, and West and Central African celebratory practices.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

pride. At least a third of the commenters identified themselves as Barbadian either in their comments or in pseudonyms such as IAMABARBADIAN, Barbadian and Proud, 246Bajan, or Offended Barbadian. At least thirty-three of their comments spoke against the article's mention of sacrifices to gods, and many asserted that Barbados is a Christian nation. At least one commenter, Lee-Ann, ended her comment with the words "Oh, and btw, WE ARE NOT PRIMITIVE." The declaration that Barbados is a Christian nation that serves one God repeated throughout the comments is one way in which to show the nation's affinity to "first-world" nations through monotheism, but it also erases a rich tradition of religious diversity.⁵³⁹ One comment in particular tried to clear it up for everyone:

Enam Wed, Aug 3, 2011, 10:13 AM

Ok to all Bajans getting offended, the part about the festival being about a celebration of the end of the sugar harvest is true (that's why it's called crop over. The part about it being related to the gods is also true, not so much for good luck, but more a way of giving thanks to the gods (... go to the Barbados Museum and check the African Gallery). It was also a way to celebrate African culture which was suppressed year round. Originally the parade was held on various plantations, not one big festival as is the case today with Kadooment. This is of course the original crop over, the one today was brought back by the government in the 70's and still celebrates the end of harvest but emancipation as well. EOnline, get your facts straight, Bajans you too.⁵⁴⁰

Here "facts" are used to dispel both the misinterpretations of celebrity media and the idealistic representations of other Barbadians. Many of these comments were not only looking for journalistic accuracy, but vehemently defended the modernity of Barbadian culture. Even in a post-independence Barbados that is proud of its "blackness" and African heritage, the idea of practicing "primitive" sacrifices to various gods was offensive. Barbadian blackness is supposed to be a modern blackness, and commenters bristled at the idea that they would be subsumed under discourses of a "primitive" Africa or Third World.

Such discourses of the modernity of Barbadian culture and cultural representations highlight the main dilemma within both national identity construction and the construction of a national brand within Barbados: how to build an attractive global product that is based on a modern identity, but whose attraction is also directly linked to historical myths of the "primitive" and tropical as well as contemporary countercultures of modernity?⁵⁴¹ The commenters here seem to want to offer the kind of "modern blackness" that increases their cultural capital and social capital. Kadooment, a celebration that is particular to Barbados but has strong similarities with other cultural practices the world over, offers a specifically Barbadian reference within brand Barbados; but without control over the representations of the Kadooment celebration, Barbadians are at the mercy of outside interpretations that may not understand the delicate balance between counterculture and modernity.

⁵³⁹ Although the overwhelming majority of the nation identifies as Christian, more specifically Protestant, several religions are practiced on the island. A centuries-old Jewish cemetery still exists in the capital city of Bridgetown near a practicing synagogue. Islam has long been practiced by a minority on the island and more than a few Barbadians can remember being woken up to a call to morning prayers.

⁵⁴⁰ Enam comment. Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

Underlying these concerns is the role that Rihanna's body, or more accurately the display of her body plays in representing the nation. As a Barbadian, her attire during Kadooment is perfectly acceptable. In Barbadian culture there is a time and place for everything, and Kadooment is the time for revealing costumes, drinks, and dancing. As a pop star the level of bared-skin has different meanings – meanings that change across audiences and contexts. In this instance, Rihanna's body is read through the lens of celebrity media, and Barbadian commentators see such a reading as inaccurate because it does not take into account the context of Kadooment Day and Barbadian culture.

Barbadian Soca Queen, Alison Hinds also had to defend herself from controversy and allegations of being overly sexual early in her career. As the frontwoman for the popular band Square One, Hinds attracted quite a bit of attention. The youngest in the group, and the only female, she found a protective family within the band. As she continues her career as a solo artist reaching a wider and wider audience she has carefully fielded critiques seeking to establish a standard for Caribbean women that marries respectability and sensuality. Although not shy in her performances and known for the movement of her backside, Alison still commands the respect of a "lady." In 2000 she explained how

A woman called... and in reference to my music asked if I considered my act vulgar. Of course I defended myself. Yes, some of my stuff is sensuous but it never gets to the point where it might be legitimately considered smutty. I reminded the caller of the big difference between sensuous and promiscuous.⁵⁴²

Hinds's so-called "vulgarity" is a stage performance. She has defined her own sensuality, and is conscious of its limits. In so doing she builds her own politics of respectability working within public discourses, but maintaining her own sense of herself as a lady and a queen. Rarely does Hinds get into the details of her sexual life either on or off-stage, and her performance of femininity is strongly rooted in Afro-Caribbean traditions wherein a woman asserts power and control over her own body. On the other hand, Rihanna's accusations of hypersexuality and/or "rude" behavior begin in her lyrics and performances within a global pop aesthetic, but extend beyond her music to her offstage antics and interviews.⁵⁴³ In a 2011 interview she says "I like to take charge, but I love to be submissive ... Being submissive in the bedroom is really fun. You get to be a little lady, to have somebody be macho and in charge of your shit. That's sexy to me."⁵⁴⁴ Her understandings of being a lady are almost always framed within a sexual conversation and under a cloak of patriarchy. The fact that she openly shares her sexual likes and dislikes with numerous interviewers also changes the reception of her sexuality, giving her a sense of availability that is commonly and historically associated with the consumption of "exotic" locations such as the Caribbean.

Similar concerns have plagued other Caribbean women in the international spotlight. Former Miss Trinidad and Tobago Universe winner Anya Ayoung-Chee found herself in the midst of scandal when a sex video of her with her boyfriend and another woman leaked to the media. Her accomplishments as a spokesperson for the Tallman Group, a charitable organization

⁵⁴² Wayne, "Celebrity Focus: Alison Hines," 24.

⁵⁴³ This could be interpreted as what Deborah Thomas terms "ghetto feminism," which is the active assertion of the power of female sexuality in ways that challenge respectability and patriarchy(Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 252-57).

⁵⁴⁴ Eells, "Queen of Pain," 80.

that seeks to empower underprivileged youth, as well as her role of national representative as a beauty queen were tarnished by images of overt sexuality.⁵⁴⁵ Even though Ayoung-Chee did not willingly expose her sex life, the exposure nonetheless placed her body (which had previously been read as a national asset) into the realm of the vulgar. She says that her entrance into the beauty queen world was a platform for her to develop her fashion skills and she designed many of the pieces she wore during the pageants; “But when it comes to the beauty queen thing, I am still very uncomfortable about it and what it says about women. But it gave me a platform and it is one of the few platforms that young women have, particularly in the developing world. You take what you have and you run with it.”⁵⁴⁶ Ayoung-Chee redeemed herself in the public eye by winning Season 9 of the popular reality show *Project Runway*. She used the opportunity and ran with it. As one writer put it her story as a “scandal-plagued exhibitionist beauty queen with a flawless complexion and exotic background” is the stuff that reality TV is made of.⁵⁴⁷ Yet Ayoung-Chee’s entrance onto *Project Runway* highlighted her non-physical talents, focusing on adorning the body rather than revealing it.

In creating her own clothing line Ayoung-Chee still seeks to represent the Caribbean region. She says “The Caribbean is something that everyone wants a piece of and we are blessed enough to own it. I want this to be an international Caribbean brand.”⁵⁴⁸ In buying her clothes, everyone can own a piece of the Caribbean. Ayoung-Chee then began as a respectable beauty queen, fell to the realm of rude via sex-scandal, and redeemed her respectability by commodifying her own image of the Caribbean through fashion.

The conversations surrounding Rihanna’s presence at Kadooment expose some of the difficulties facing Barbadians who wish to promote themselves as a modern nation-state in the shadow of myths of exoticism and primitivism that at times serve the tourism product. Barbadian culture is both rigidly conservative and conspicuously laid back. Promotions of the island’s culture rely on a carefully constructed image of controlled abandon, one that is easily misread in celebrity news outlets that focus on individuals rather than collective identities. All of these misreadings, their corrections, and the corrections of corrections stemmed from a few photos of one woman circulated out of context. Rihanna’s commodified celebrity image threatened to overshadow that of brand Barbados. Rihanna’s celebration of Kadooment, as some comments noted, should not be an extraordinary event. But her participation coupled with her celebrity status has real effects on how the rest of the world views the nation and exposes some of the insecurities of the national identity in the conversations that ensue. While Rihanna’s participation in the festival gave it more publicity than most advertisers could afford, many Barbadians wondered if such publicity was worthwhile if it meant that the festival and the nation could (and would) be grossly misrepresented by celebrity-oriented media.

As the 2011 LOUD tour made its way across the United States praise and criticism swirled around it. Fan reviews gushed at how beautiful Rihanna appeared, while critics found fault with her barely-there costuming. The reviews posted on *livenation.com* ran the gamut, but overwhelmingly praised the show increasing Rihanna’s ranking on the site to 4.3 on a five star scale.⁵⁴⁹ Many of the five-star reviews noted the elaborate stage set (complete with moving

⁵⁴⁵ Mallett, “‘Project Runway’ Designer.”

⁵⁴⁶ “Anya Ayoung-Chee Dishes.”

⁵⁴⁷ O’Connor, “Sex-Scandal Beauty Queen.”

⁵⁴⁸ “Anya Ayoung-Chee Dishes.”

⁵⁴⁹ Live Nation merged with Ticketmaster in 2009 to become the largest ticket seller for live music.

sidewalk allowing Rihanna to strut in place), the bright colors, and the abundance of theatrics throughout the show. The one-star reviews, however, pointed out how she was over an hour late to her own show (in more than one city), she didn't actually sing for much of the performance (but relied on the backtrack), and let much of the set and theatrics do the work for her. Even some of the fans that gave her good reviews noted some of these aspects suggesting that "the abundance of style become's the work's substance."⁵⁵⁰

Regardless of one's standards of quality for live musical performance, most of the criticism surrounded the idea that Rihanna should be a better role model, and that the crotch-grabbing, expletive-laced adlibs, drinking on stage, and "simulated sex" with audience members brought on stage for that purpose were perhaps not the most wholesome antics of a young woman in the public eye. These reports, which circulated globally, did not go unnoticed in Barbados. While international critiques focused on the intersection of pop star and role model status, Barbadians were reminded that Rihanna is also Cultural Ambassador to Youth on the island. While her level of success was to be applauded, her onstage behavior fed an ongoing fear of "rude" culture subsuming respectable Barbadian ideals on the island. While Rihanna has often commented on whether or not pop stars should or should not be considered role models,⁵⁵¹ she does not comment on her status as a representative of the nation of Barbados nearly as frequently. The comments that circulated in the Barbadian press were no different than earlier discussions of her stardom—praising her, criticizing her, and as a child of Barbadian soil protectively doing both—but when it was announced that she would be bringing the show home to the island in August of 2011 the conversations changed.

While a few in the business sector voiced concern over the timing of the concert fearing it might draw the limited funds of Barbadians away from the Crop Over festivities,⁵⁵² by and large most Barbadians who had something to say about it (Rihanna included) thought it was long overdue.⁵⁵³ Very few of the concerns voiced included any wariness about the content of the show itself. Perhaps most agreed with Trinidadian-born cultural theorist C.L.R. James's 1960s assertion that "at this stage of our existence, our writers and our artists must be able to come home if they want to."⁵⁵⁴ Local papers showed photos of the stage being built in Kensington Oval, and the faces of onlookers who recognized that it would be the biggest show the island had ever seen.⁵⁵⁵ Tickets sold out. Hair salons, barber shops, and retail stores saw a small boom in business as concertgoers prepared for the event. The BTA reported that the concert "attracted more than 10,000 regional tourists, who pumped \$8.6 million into the Barbadian economy."⁵⁵⁶

As the concert began reporters and attendees chronicled each detail in reports that flew through twitter, facebook, and word of mouth. Local acts including internationally recognized Cover Drive would perform. The DJ for the tour won over the crowd by playing local music,

⁵⁵⁰ Lobato, "Amazing Grace," 136.

⁵⁵¹ Rihanna says "I feel like pop stars can't be rock stars anymore because they have to be role models, and it takes the fun out of it for us" (Hill, "Rihanna Talks," 401).

⁵⁵² There were similar concerns over the cost of the tickets and whether or not they would be affordable to the average Barbadian or target the upper classes on the island and wealthy visitors.

⁵⁵³ "Rihanna Local Concert."

⁵⁵⁴ James, "Artist in the Caribbean," 7.

⁵⁵⁵ Best, "The Stage is Set."

⁵⁵⁶ Alleyne, "Tourism Minister Pushing Culture." \$8.6 million Barbadian dollars translates to roughly \$4.3 million U.S. dollars. The BTA had expected to attract 4,000 visitors and spent \$4million Barbadian on the concert ("Barbados gets loud!").

including Rupee's 2011 summer hit "I Am a Bajan."⁵⁵⁷ Patrons were photographed entering in the most stylishly outrageous outfits. And then other photos appeared: Fans leaning against walls and each other, trying not to sit in the mud and grass, but exhausted from waiting over an hour between the opening acts and the main event. Though some were angry, most forgave Rihanna as she performed her LOUD show on home soil.

While the BTA emphasized that the show would be the same as every other performance on the tour, others noted that much of the sexuality prominent in Rihanna's adlibbing and spontaneous performance acts had been noticeably toned down. Barbados stands at a complicated crossroads being one of the more conservative cultures in the Caribbean, having a fairly solid history of other cultural influences, and in the twenty-first century strong conversations surrounding what appropriate sexuality looks like for its youth.⁵⁵⁸ The sexual politics of the Caribbean often differ from those of those of even a heterogeneous global audience. The presentations of sexuality within the pop music market also have drastically different iterations. On the one hand it was an important statement of Barbadian modernity for a Bajan artist to bring such a technical show to the island. On the other hand, with the differing cultural contexts, there remained ambiguity around the sexual content of the Cultural Ambassador for Youth's performance. Such ambiguity has become a signature aspect of Rihanna's brand, and is evident within the LOUD show itself.

One segment of the show began with a montage of images of Rihanna dressed in a men's suit in some shots and wearing a dress in others. Not quite androgynous, she flirted with herself on screen before being revealed seated in a suit on stage. While she began to sing a cover of Prince's hit "Darling Nikki" she played with a cane while her female dancers used the poles to either side of her.⁵⁵⁹ During this part of the performance, Rihanna often stopped singing in order to dance with or just touch the dancers' bodies performing an ambiguous sexuality. During the song she remained in control of them, but the tables turned as her dancers stripped her down to a white body suit and chain her for the performance of "S&M." The choice to cover this Prince song is telling of the ways in which Rihanna has used her sexuality in the past few years. One of Prince's largest assets as a star is his in-your-face yet ambiguous sexuality. The ambiguity of his performances extends to his image as he sits squarely between 'godliness and promiscuity, maschismo and effeminacy, spirituality and material ostentation, futurism and nostalgia, black rhythm and white rock.'⁵⁶⁰ Prince's endurance in the music industry relies on his musical talent, but also on the power he exerts using sexuality and the allure he produces through his ambiguity.

⁵⁵⁷ This was common throughout the tour. The deejay would play local music wherever possible. Rupee's song, "I Am a Bajan," won him the title of People's Monarch that summer. The People's Monarch competition is a radio contest where listeners call and text to vote for their favorite song of the Crop Over festival. It is the only Crop Over competition decided directly by fans.

⁵⁵⁸ Debates around whether teens should be able to access medical care without parental consent are framed by opponents around reproductive health care. HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns have affected conversations of responsibility and sexuality. A 2011 statement by British Prime Minister has caused a stir when he said that Britain would not give aid to countries who do not have a good track record in protecting the rights of its homosexual citizens. Many Barbadians, officials and ordinary citizens, viewed the statement as a bullying into a homosexual lifestyle and an attack on the sovereignty of the nation.

⁵⁵⁹ "Darling Nikki" is the song of a woman who is a "sex fiend," and chronicles the singer's encounter with her, beginning with meeting "her in a hotel lobby masturbating with a magazine," continuing with a night at a castle, and ending with a goodbye note that says "thank you for a funky time. Call me up whenever you want to grind" (Prince, "Darling Nikki.")

⁵⁶⁰ Pauline Kael in *New Yorker* quoted in Taylor, "Baby I'm a Star," 162.

The performance of a Prince cover is not the first instance where Rihanna has used an ambiguous sexuality, one which falls rather squarely outside of a brand Barbados ideal, but squarely within Rihanna's brand of pop stardom. In 2011 she released "Te Amo," whose lyrics and accompanying video more than hinted at (bi-)sexual curiosity,⁵⁶¹ and in response to questions about her relationship with Matt Kemp she told one reporter "I hate to burst your bubble...but no. I'm dating girls!"⁵⁶² Rihanna's flirtations with bisexuality could be read as a transgressive exercise of power; a young attempt at to exert the kind of control performed through Barbadian and/or queer femininity; a ploy of stardom to remain ambiguous, ambivalent, and thus enigmatic a la Prince; or (as she suggested in response to her controversial S&M video) they might also be a metaphor for her relationship with stardom.⁵⁶³ Even with these apparent flirtations, no one seems to question Rihanna as a heterosexual woman. What these performances do is create the possibility of "something more" in her public image. They tell her audience that no matter how much of her or how often they may see her, there's always the possibility of something else. So that even in her most revealing of costumes her allure is solidified since "the most charismatic celebrities are the ones we can only imagine, even if we see them naked everywhere."⁵⁶⁴ It raises the question: if ambiguity is a constitutive part of pop stardom, what happens when a pop star is given the task of representing a nation, one which, however ambiguous its national identity may be, has a fairly clear ideal of the image it would like to proffer to the rest of the world?

In the written reports that came out post-show, there were no critiques of raunchiness, no questions of appropriate or inappropriate behavior, only an overwhelming pride in a young girl who had worked the stage for Barbados.⁵⁶⁵ Much of this pride was rooted in the idea that bigger is better, and that Rihanna's theatric set-up brought a different level of modernity to the island's performance scene.⁵⁶⁶ This is supported by the local reporting of the show. For the first time,

⁵⁶¹ Described by one facebook fan as a "sexual, fashionable little ditty to Bi-curious girls," Rihanna's 2011 song "Te Amo" explores a budding relationship between two women, one of whom is wary of the sexual overtones. The chorus presents the confusion: "Then she says te amo, then she put her hand around me waist, I told her no/She cries te amo, I told her I'm not gonna run away, but let me go/ My soul is awry, without asking why, I said te amo,/ Wouldn't somebody tell me what she said/ Don't it mean I love you, think it means I love you, don't it mean I love you." The video supports the conflicted attraction and features French model Laetitia Casta. Rihanna and Casta enact a slow cat and mouse chase within a lavish old church. Each exerts a very physical presence over the other, but the solo shots of Casta show her longing, while the solo shots of Rihanna show a more complicated search for control. The dark red lighting, the use of a blaring fireplace as a background, and the capoeiristas who perform for them all frame this desire in a cloud of danger. Such danger is highlighted at the end of the video with a montage of all of the previous scenes that leads to the two sitting down for dinner outside. They sit at either side of a long table which is ablaze between them. Another facebook fan commented "it is a beautiful video that goes completely with the song. ...instead of copping out and making a video that de-emphasized the homosexual aspect she turned it into a homage to her position as sex symbol/pop superstar without offending anyone with a brain."

⁵⁶² Eells, "Queen of Pain," 42.

⁵⁶³ Rihanna said, "The song can be taken very literally, but it's actually a very metaphorical song. It's about the love-hate relationship with the media and how sometimes the pain is pleasurable. We feed off it, you know—or I do. And it was a very personal message that I was trying to get across. I wanted the video to say that but still play off the theme of S&M. And I mean, *wow*, people went crazy. They just saw sex. And when I see that video, I don't see that at all. I wanted it to be cheeky. There's no other way to take it" (Van Meter, "Living Out Loud," 265).

⁵⁶⁴ Roach, *It*, 22.

⁵⁶⁵ While there was little criticizing the show in the written reports a NationNews online poll related that of 146 votes 61.0% marked the concert as excellent; 16.4% -good; 14.4% poor; and 8.2% average.

⁵⁶⁶ Best, "The stage is set."

the newspaper *Barbados Today* gave minute by minute updates.⁵⁶⁷ Utilizing facebook and its own online site, the paper detailed the experiences of the fans, the show itself, and their own process in reporting it. Such a style of journalism was new. The biggest international star of Barbados, had brought the biggest show the island had seen to one of its most heralded venues.⁵⁶⁸ And to top it off she sat on the edge of the stage and told the audience how good it felt to perform for them.⁵⁶⁹

The critiques surrounding the show hardly mentioned Rihanna at all,⁵⁷⁰ focusing on the BTA's role in the show. One commenter summed it up: "All take a bow. That said, while the Rihanna/RocNation delivery was flawlessly world class, the same cannot be said for the local hospitality and logistic elements of the show,"⁵⁷¹ suggesting that in the eyes of the audience at Kensington Oval brand Barbados needs to catch up to brand Rihanna. One of the complaints was that unlike other performances at Kensington Oval the National Anthem was not played at the outset of the show.⁵⁷² In this moment brand Rihanna stood in for brand Barbados. Regardless of her genre, Rihanna performing on Barbadian soil may have been symbolic enough that the customary expression of nationalism through the playing of the national anthem could be momentarily discarded, but not without the notice of her Barbadian audience. Her role as a widely successful pop star who grew up only blocks from the stage she was performing on, stood for both the modernity of Barbadian culture and its attractiveness to a global audience.

The praise of Rihanna was slightly stained only months later when an interview she gave to *British Vogue* magazine reached stands. Rihanna commented that she owns a small chain that says "cunt" and that the

word is so offensive to everyone in the world *except* for Bajans. You know African-Americans use the n-word to their brothers? Well, that's the way we use the c-word. When I first came here, I was saying it like it was nothing, like, 'Hey, cunt,' until my make-up artist finally had to tell me stop. I just never knew.⁵⁷³

These comments fueled a variety of criticism over the way that Rihanna was representing the nation, especially after having just signed the three-year deal with the Barbados Tourism Authority. Some questioned where exactly in Barbados Rihanna grew up that she would hear the word used so casually.⁵⁷⁴ Others admitted that the word was used often,⁵⁷⁵ but with obvious offense.⁵⁷⁶ Still others were baffled as to how a young woman who had gone to one of the top secondary schools on the island, who had been said to be so articulate "never knew" how

⁵⁶⁷ *Barbados Today* is one of the island's newer news outposts. While it is already technologically ahead of its peers as a strictly online paper, use of minute by minute updates for the concert marked a change in its reporting practice.

⁵⁶⁸ Kensington Oval is a cricket arena. As such it has been the site of performance for many of the most heralded cricketers in the nation's history, as well as being one of the biggest sites on the island for musical performances.

⁵⁶⁹ Martindale, "Rihanna thanks the crowd." Although this is presumably a heartfelt gesture, it is also part of the show as Rihanna sat on the edge of the stage and talked to and thanked each audience on the LOUD tour.

⁵⁷⁰ She was, however, widely criticized for leaving the after party after only minutes of attendance as many who paid quite a lot for the tickets were expecting her presence throughout the night.

⁵⁷¹ Martindale, "LOUD concerns about Rihanna show."

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ D'Souza, "Rihanna Rocks," 254.

⁵⁷⁴ comments Martindale, "Rihanna, Shut up and Sing."

⁵⁷⁵ kay comments Rodrigo, "Rihanna Covers British Vogue."

⁵⁷⁶ Spencer, "C-Word for the Publicity?"; comments "Rihanna's love for the c-word."

offensive the word was.⁵⁷⁷ Even some of her supporters chimed in writing articles with titles like “Rihanna, shut up and sing.”⁵⁷⁸

The initial celebration of Rihanna as official spokesperson had gone sour as some realized that her pretty face did not mean that she would always have pretty things to say about her culture. The beauty proffered within brand Barbados was much different and perhaps more delicate than the beauty of Rihanna’s pop star image. In relying on Rihanna as a spokeswoman, Barbados has to negotiate images of modernity with Rihanna’s reliance on countercultural practices. Brand Barbados and brand Rihanna are both appealing to global audiences, but the stakes are very different. As a national brand, hundreds of thousands of people are invested in the success or failure of brand Barbados making it much more delicate than the team of people promoting and directly depending upon a pop star like Rihanna.

Regardless of the continued critiques of Rihanna’s behavior, in the eyes of the Barbadian government, the possibility of tapping into the global name recognition of brand Rihanna seems to outweigh the risks of publicly allying brand Barbados with its most well-known citizen. Reports of Rihanna’s “bad” behavior include detailing how she spends her leisure time: “the Bajan singer’s been spotted at a strip club in London, a sex shop in Paris and a marijuana “coffee shop” in Amsterdam”⁵⁷⁹; and opinions from “sources close to” her such as: “Rihanna is running on empty but she’s still been going out drinking and living it up,” and “Rihanna’s living a rough life these days.”⁵⁸⁰ Religious leaders on the island have expressed concern over her “bad habits” and called her “unfit” to be an ambassador, while lay persons seem divided, both supporting the

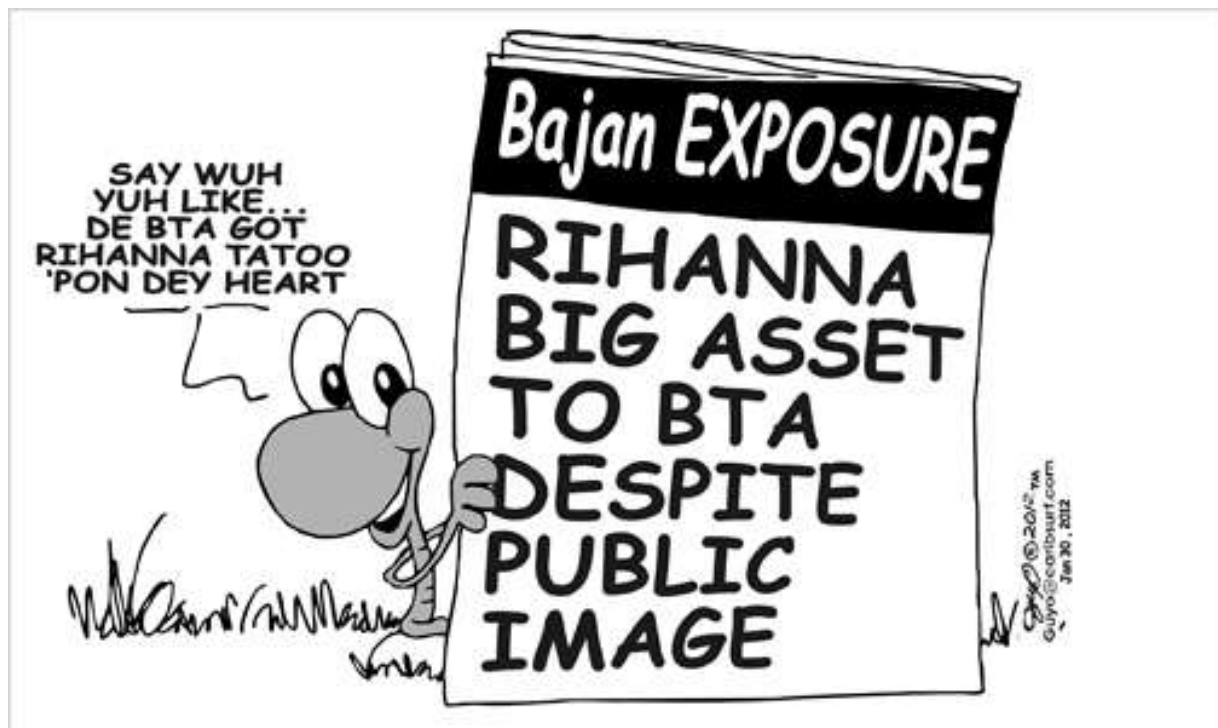


Figure 5.10

⁵⁷⁷ Spencer, “C-Word for the Publicity?”

⁵⁷⁸ Martindale, “Rihanna, Shut up and Sing.”

⁵⁷⁹ “Rihanna hospitalized in Sweden.”

⁵⁸⁰ “Rihanna ordered: Stop partying”; Martindale. “What’s Trending: Rihanna lights up.”

critiques and dismissing them.⁵⁸¹ Still, the BTA (if not Barbadians more generally) stand by Rihanna using her individual celebrity as a promotional tool for the nation.

The Barbados government's deals with Rihanna to become a spokesperson for the nation and its youth are an attempt to capitalize on her embodied cultural capital as a young Barbadian woman who has successfully entered into the U.S. music industry and built a brand name for herself on the global market. Their contracts, however, fall short of ownership over brand Rihanna, and as such Rihanna lets the critiques roll and continues to promote her brand. In a 2012 interview with *Elle* magazine she explains that her love of party scenes is built on her discomfort with always being in the public eye saying that "I love going to the club, because that's the one place that nobody's checking for me."⁵⁸² The interviewer goes on to explain that Rihanna "refuses to conform to anyone else's ideas about how she should behave."⁵⁸³ However dependent or entangled brand Barbados is becoming on brand Rihanna, neither the Barbadian government, nor Barbadian citizens – whether fans or critics – owns the means of production of brand Rihanna. They can only hope to reap the material and symbolic benefits of Rihanna's capital, while attempting to build the ideal of brand Barbados into a reality. Such hope continues in the Barbados Tourism Authority's 2012 print campaign, which relies heavily on Rihanna's image to sell the island to tourists.

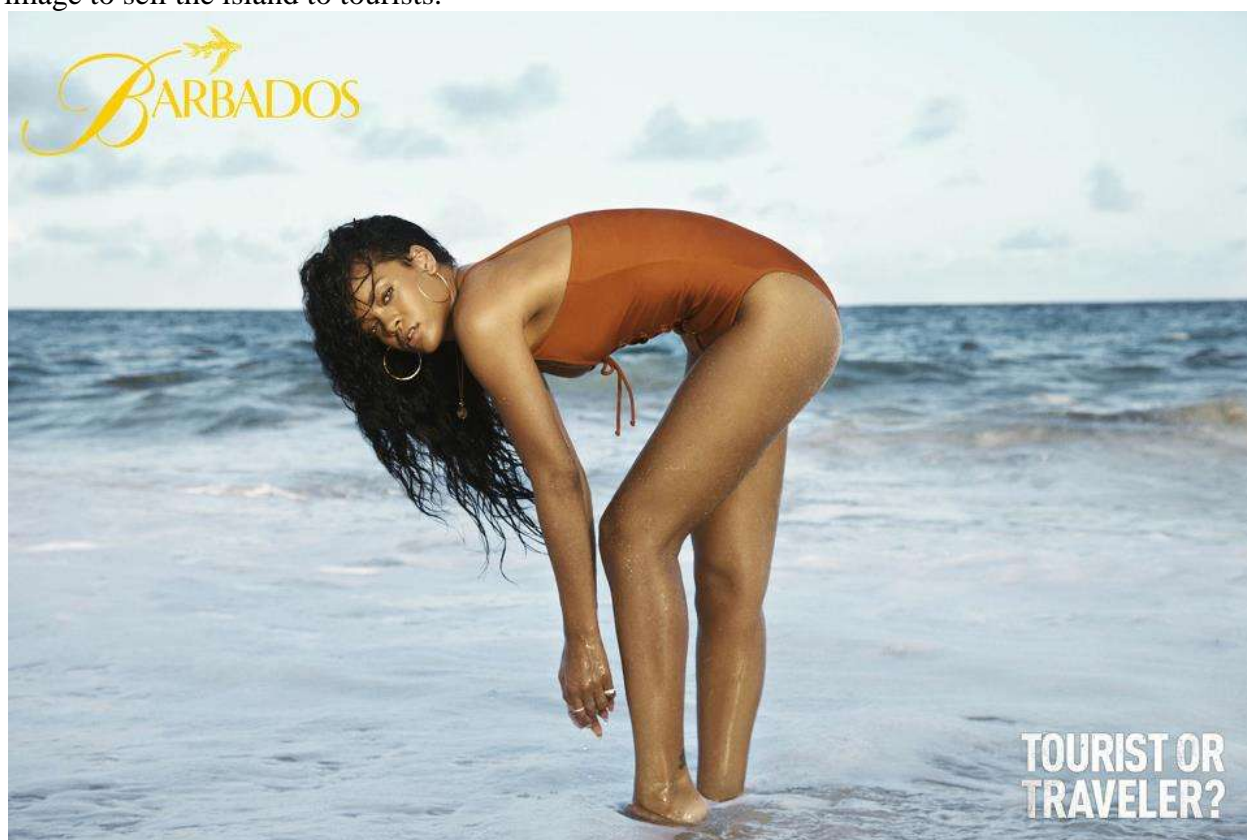


Figure 5.11
one image from the Barbados Tourism Authority's 2012 visual campaign

⁵⁸¹ "Pastor Concerned About Rihanna"; King, "Rihanna 'Not Fit.'"

⁵⁸² "Forever Strong." *Elle* Magazine. May 2012, 302.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, 307.

“FLY”: LIMINALITY MEETS CELEBRITY (UN)BOUNDED

[Rihanna] I came to win, to fight, to conquer, to thrive
 I came to win, to survive, to prosper, to rise
 To flyyyy....To flyyyy
 [Nicki Minaj]
 Cause I am not a word, I am not a line
 I am not a girl that can every be defined
 I am not fly, I am levitation
 I represent an entire generation⁵⁸⁴

Since Rihanna’s signing to Def Jam in 2005, numerous other young Caribbean and Caribbean descended artists have made a place for themselves within the U.S. market: Sean Kingston of Jamaica, Jason Derulo of Haitian descent, Melanie Fiona of Guyana, and Trinidadian born Nicki Minaj. While Minaj moved to the U.S. at age five and does not represent herself as a Caribbean woman in much of her public image, she still maintains a connection by performing in Trinidad in 2010 and collaborations with other Caribbean artists such as Rihanna and Sean Kingston. Rihanna’s flights between Barbados and Evan Rogers studio produced a career that has changed the relationship between pop music and the nation she calls home. Like the video for Nicki Minaj’s “Fly” these artists have entered into the pop music market seeking to make their marks with new approaches to old styles, old struggles, and old discourses in hopes of creating new growth. Seeking to be more than “fly,” they levitate (being neither here nor there, yet still present) repositioning their own liminality as diasporic subjects, and serving as articulated joints between the cultures of their forebears and the markets they now invade, between their own individual dreams and collective wishes for the kind of success that has an ever-changing definition. This conclusion will explore the relationship between national representation, gendered performance, and individual celebrity. Using the 2011 collaboration between Nicki Minaj and Rihanna I argue that these women employ specifically Caribbean uses of mimicry as creation, and imitation as reinvention within their rise to stardom.

Homi Bhabha theorizes the use of mimicry within colonial contexts in two ways. First, the colonizers encourage mimicry rather than assimilation. The act of mimicking marks one as “other,” because one can never really become the colonizing subject. Such a use reinforces hegemony. Secondly, the colonized can also appropriate the use of mimicry for their own use. Because colonial mimicry relies on ambivalence, its “doubleness” allows for a challenge to its authority.⁵⁸⁵ Derek Walcott draws on this second sense of mimicry and takes it further arguing for mimicry as a site of creation. He says, “anyone in the Caribbean is fated to unoriginality,”⁵⁸⁶ but there is something to be done with that fate. Artists and performers in particular have the power to reinvent the roles they mimic, not becoming the original, but creating a new original in the process. Walcott posits that it is the liminality of Caribbean subjects that allows for this process.

⁵⁸⁴ Minaj feat. Rihanna, “Fly.”

⁵⁸⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 126.

⁵⁸⁶ Walcott, “The Caribbean,” 8.

We see similar usages and some dangers in Louis Chude-Sokei's analysis of Bert Williams's blackface performances. Williams, born in the Bahamas, entered into a U.S. performance market in the late nineteenth century when blackface was the predominant trope. He mimicked white images of Black Americans in order to find a place for himself on the U.S. stage, and especially when his partner George Walker died, began to play with the ways in which he could subvert the form to tell stories that weren't being told at the time. Using blackface masks as a means to success, however he may have affected racial discourses, still locked him unhappily within the mask of the happy "darker."⁵⁸⁷ The trope has the power to overshadow its usefulness. In using familiar narratives to build their careers, Rihanna and Nicki Minaj have reinvented themselves and the performance arenas they have entered. Yet, in doing so, there is the danger of reinforcing the very narratives that they use in the rise to pop stardom. Their 2011 collaboration "Fly" is one example of this.

The video to the 2011 Nicki Minaj/Rihanna collaboration "Fly" opens in a wasteland.⁵⁸⁸ Rihanna's voice enters with the hook as Minaj, styled futuristically, steps out of a sports car and assesses the scene bringing color to the otherwise drab black and white setting. The camera goes between close ups of Minaj's face and scenes of the burnt remains of another time. Throughout the first verse Minaj surveys the wreckage of a plane crash: the plane seats, flip flops, and burnt U.S. passport showing signs of travel, but no travelers to embody the wish to go somewhere else. There is a long shot of burnt sunglasses reminding one of a pop version of the Greek myth of Icarus. All the while Nicki Minaj details her rise to stardom against the expectations of many. In detailing her efforts to rise against friends and enemies Rihanna joins her for the hook in a haze of still burning destruction. Their pink and red fashion is the only color on the scene, and even as they walk on decimated ground they rise above it with four-inch stilettos. The video continues in the hazy wasteland with Minaj declaring her stance as a representative of an entire generation while slowly moving across a grounded airplane wing, before physically fighting off the demons that haunt her, she in a bright white costume, and her foes represented as shadowy figures dressed in all black. As the video ends with the artists' declaration that they have come to fly, new growth digitally appears out of the wreckage, green vines bearing pink roses and daisies. The camera moves upward toward the sky.

This video presents the scenes of a Caribbean romance gone wrong. Belinda Edmondson uses the term "romance" "to describe the idealized representations of Caribbean society."⁵⁸⁹ She draws her use of the term from literary studies where the romance genre relies heavily on stock themes saying that "it is precisely this quality, this petrification of ideology into stock characters, ideas, and phrases that connects the romance genres to the themes of classic Caribbean discourse."⁵⁹⁰ We know the story of U.S. citizens flying off on a Caribbean vacation. It has been told time and time again. But here, Minaj and Rihanna reinvent this trope in order to tell the tale of their own soaring stardom. The plane has crashed. Those sandals will never again walk on sandy white beaches, but this site of destruction is the jumping off point for these two women who are continuing their ascent within the pop world.

We also know the story—with all of its variety—of black female pop stars in music videos. Neither Minaj nor Rihanna is a damsel in distress. They fall more into the trope of black

⁵⁸⁷ Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darker,"* 25.

⁵⁸⁸ NickiMinajAtVevo. "Nicki Minaj – Fly."

⁵⁸⁹ Edmondson, "The Caribbean," 2.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

woman warrior, with a sense of fashion. Even while walking through wreckage they use fashion as a way to signify with their bodies: the boldness of the colors, cuts, and fabrics they wear paint them as other than victim with their bodies standing in contrast to the gray wreckage. The story is told costumed in form-fitting outfits complete with four-inch heels. This is what their audiences expect of them, even if those audiences have come to expect the unexpected. They may be fighters, but they are fighters with style. Making such statements of reinvention and determination visually within a music video, rather than in an interview or even more overtly within the song's lyrics, is one way these artists meld their positions as women and as foreign-born celebrities. The wreckage is both a tragedy already in the past and a well-heeded warning for the future. Their solitude within the video suggests that they will heed that warning, not becoming the pop version of Icarus; flying, but not being destroyed by their ambition. Such careful restraint can be seen in how relatively tame this video is compared to the bodies of work that both artists are known for. The video ends with the two women grounded, yet the final camera shot that scans upward toward the sky suggests that they are able and ready to fly.

Both artists have built their public images on the tropes of pop stars before them. Minaj's bright spunky style is reminiscent of Missy Elliot, Lil Wayne, Barbie, Lil Kim, and arguably Trinidadian Carnival aesthetics. Rihanna's image draws on the likes of women as diverse as Beyoncé, Grace Jones, Madonna, and Sharon Stone. Each works within highly recognizable tropes to bring their own brand of stardom into the pop market. The video for "Fly" is indicative of the kind of global pop aspirations that they and fellow transnational artists (M.I.A., Akon, and K'naan) have exercised. The use of the crashed plane is an allegory on the theme of "Fly," but in light of lyrics such as "Cry my eyes out for days upon days/Such a heavy burden placed upon me/ But when you go hard your nay's become yea's/ Yankee stadium with Jays and Kanyes," it could also be read as a comment on these Caribbean women's rise from developing nations to U.S. pop stardom.⁵⁹¹

In building an image, Rihanna has relied on the Caribbean as a backdrop, but her presentation of the region and the island of Barbados is arguably based on foreign tropes of what the Caribbean should be. Her position as a pop star marks her as a product, and her representations of the region are packaged much the same way she is. Still, using her reliance on old tropes of the Caribbean and of women in general, Rihanna has been able to create a space for herself in an international market. A 2006 cover article *SHECaribbean* magazine noted that

From Jamaica's Bob Marley and Sean Paul to Trinidad's Mighty Sparrow, Kevin Lyttle from St. Vincent and fellow Bajan Rupee, prior to Rihanna's success it seemed the prerequisite for Caribbean musical achievement was male DNA. Women were generally only granted local stardom, destined to work the regional music circuit until hopefully fate intervened.⁵⁹²

No other Barbadian woman has reached the heights of stardom that Rihanna has. Her use of familiar tropes provides a sense of nostalgia for an older audience, while she purports to speak for the current generation. She relies on foreign narratives of the Caribbean to represent her island home, yet is unapologetic in using what she sees as Barbadian customs: partying,

⁵⁹¹ or in the case of Nicki Minaj as a woman within the hip hop industry

⁵⁹² Taylor, "The Bajan Beyoncé," 61.

drinking, and choice language. Her success has brought more attention to the Caribbean region, and/or at the very least made many a Caribbean artist's dream plausible.

Through Rihanna's image, foreigners can still view the Caribbean as sexy, leisure, familiar and exotic.⁵⁹³ Women in the pop market are still viewed as spectacle, commodity, and (when above or near the legal age of consent) sexualized. Her quickness in forging her career makes for an unclear picture of her success. Perhaps it is not that Rihanna has done anything new, but that she has taken definitions of success to new places using a multitude of the same old paths. It is very hard to distinguish whether her achievements are due to the hard work that she has put in, the opportunities she has had, or the changing nature of the market into which she was thrust. Most likely all of these factors are necessary to understand the phenomenon that Rihanna has become.

Caribbean historian and cultural theorist C.L.R. James explains how "we cannot force the growth of the artist. But we can force and accelerate the growth of the conditions in which [s]he can make the best of the gifts that [s]he has been fortunate enough to be born with."⁵⁹⁴ Critics aren't sure what if any gifts Rihanna possesses, but in light of her increasing list of accolades and sales she must be doing something right. Rihanna has the gift of mimicry. In Walcott's sense of Caribbean mimicry, the kind that "is an act of imagination,"⁵⁹⁵ Rihanna has built a celebrity empire. Her superstardom, like much of Caribbean culture, originated in imitation and ends with invention.⁵⁹⁶ She has mimicked the image of young black female pop star to the point of reinvention. Rihanna's stardom has produced a penchant for avatar-like reinvention that slowly shrinks the distance between the "real" Rihanna and Robyn Fenty, between Barbadian ideals and Barbadian realities, and between the commodities of popular culture and popular performances of culture. She does so with Barbados as her foundation, saying that with support of her Barbadian fans, she "feels like [she] can take on the world."⁵⁹⁷ In her use of various tropes she has been able to construct an individual career and a space for national representation hitherto unseen. Yet, her reliance on these tropes (specifically the Caribbean as tropical exotic paradise and the image of a defiantly sexual young black woman) runs the risk of enforcing them within the public eye. With such a strong representative out there could Barbados ever purport to be something other than a tourist friendly, idyllic landscape? Can young black female pop stars build a career without a reliance on sexuality and/or fashion? In the market/context that the superstar of Rihanna grew out of, the constructed representations become just as important as the realities they represent. The masks overtake the faces behind them as the constant reinvention has become indicative of an entire generation of young consumers, artists, and nations using a plethora of tropes and models in order to fly free of each model's limitations. With all of the ambiguity within her performance as a global celebrity and her performance as a young black Barbadian woman, as a public persona Rihanna represents the possibilities and dangers of a young female pop superstar representing a truly independent national identity on a global stage.

⁵⁹³ This is possible through the practices of stardom and commodity fetishism wherein the production of her image is hidden from the consumer. See Mulvey, "Xala, Ousmane Sembene 1976."

⁵⁹⁴ James, "Artist in the Caribbean," 6.

⁵⁹⁵ Walcott, "The Caribbean," 10.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁹⁷ Taylor, "The Bajan Beyoncé," 65.

Chapter Six

Remapping Bim

The internet has democratised access to the tools that generate information flows and our stage has lost its boundaries. Let us now discard the barriers of the mind.⁵⁹⁸

If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly (the decline of the Empire witnesses the frying of this map, little by little, and its fall into ruins, though some shreds are still discernible in the deserts—the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction testifying to a pride equal to the Empire and rotting like carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, a bit as the double ends by being confused with the real through aging,)—as the most beautiful allegory of simulation, this fable has now come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of second-order simulacra.⁵⁹⁹

Other than “Little England” Barbados’s second most common nickname is “Bim.” It is rumored to come from Bimshire a county in England, or perhaps the followers of Byam a royalist leader, or as the National Cultural Foundation posits, it stems from the Igbo phrase that means “my people”; and there is still the theory that it is just a word that represents the national area code of 246, but since the name is older than phones, that explanation is probably not credible.⁶⁰⁰ Mostly, the term Bim is a colloquial imaginary, an insider’s term. The history of the name is irrelevant as the speculation on its origins only serves to demonstrate the many interlocking histories at the foundation of Barbadian culture. Barbadian culture has always been an amalgamation of influences adapted and innovated into something distinctly Barbadian. Within the twenty-first century, increased technologies for the travel of physical bodies and commodities as well as information have allowed Barbadians to expand the boundaries of the national culture and effectively remap a Barbadian imaginary. This project has argued that in order to understand Barbados’s evolving national identity one must remap the imaginary of Barbados to include the transnational, diasporic, and global networks that sustain it. By way of conclusion, this chapter argues that is also imperative to recognize how the contest between materiality and idealism within Barbadian identity formation has entered the realm of the hyperreal. In doing so this chapter will trouble the concept of the “foreign.” Rather than explore the “cultural penetration” occurring in Barbados and throughout the developing world, I identify the ways that Barbadians are using so-called foreign influences and technologies in order to represent the nation and perform a national identity across the globe.

⁵⁹⁸ Rudder, *Different Drummer*, 35.

⁵⁹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

⁶⁰⁰ Bim is another affectionate nickname of the island. The National Cultural Foundation offers the following explanation for the origins of the term: “The island has been called Bimshire or Bim because the word ‘bim’ was a word frequently used by slaves, Igbo people who originated in eastern Nigeria. The word is a contraction of *be mu*, which means my people” (www.ncf.bb/backyard/island.htm). Other popular versions of the origin include a connection to an England parish named Bimshire, and a seventeenth century English royalist by the name of Byam.

This chapter begins with Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal in order to explore the ways in which Barbados's post-independence desire to be something more than "Little England" has developed into the performance of an ideal, such that in a tourist economy where representation is key to national survival, the ideal becomes more important than the lived experiences of those who enact it. The line (if there ever was one) between aspirations and realities is constantly being redrawn, so much so that it is almost impossible to trace it. I argue that new technologies facilitate such an enactment of a Barbadian ideal allowing Barbadians to supercede notions of space and place and remap the possibilities of representing a Barbadian nation. This analysis focuses on the Barbadian performers previously mentioned throughout the project and the ways in which their promotions of themselves as artists do or do not serve to also promote the nation they hail from. I also look at their audiences and critics and the ways in which they identify and/or disidentify with images and ideals these artists offer. The chapter ends with a look at how the contingencies of the contemporary moment have both presented new opportunities and locked the nation, and the artists who represent it, into long-held myths of the Caribbean.

THE HYPERREAL AND CYBER HOMES

Caribbean culture, as we knew it traditionally, died in the decade of the 1990s.⁶⁰¹

Published in 2008 *The Politics of Caribbean Cyberculture*, written by Barbadian cultural scholar Curwen Best begins with the sentiment above. The cultural explosion of the 1990s in Barbados coincided with the rise of internet technology forever changing what Caribbean culture could be.⁶⁰² Artists began "engaging in the process of creating culture through the digital domain. It [was] indeed this technological moment, the point of discovery, which [was] very responsible for the kind of new urgency within the musical sphere of the creative arts. In the 1980s and 1990s it became possible for artists to reassess the creative act by harnessing the power of the technological process."⁶⁰³ The power of technology (as it tends to do) changed the power of creativity. And for a nation that relied increasingly on a service economy and tourism in particular, such a creative arena served as an important site of representation. This is not to say that the historical traditions entirely disappeared. The traditions that had previously defined Barbadian culture became subsumed by their own representations that traveled easily across web pages, in chat rooms, and in blogs. The constant barrage of representations geared toward foreigners and Barbadians alike become the standard for what is "real"ly Barbadian. In this way we see how images are "substituting the signs of the real for the real" creating what is essentially a new kind of myth.⁶⁰⁴

Roland Barthes's definition of myth as a sign without a signified, as a representation emptied of its history, takes on new importance in the digital age. The multitude of signifiers, of ways in which to represent, take over the signified. Baudrillard explains using the fable of

⁶⁰¹ Best, *Politics of Caribbean Cyberculture*, 1.

⁶⁰² The 1990s also saw a moment of economic crisis in Barbados, that was somewhat "alleviated" by an IMF loan. It was the most important moment in Barbados's independent history for culture to become a viable industry. See Harewood, "Policy and Performance."

⁶⁰³ Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, 233.

⁶⁰⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2.

Borges map. He says “[Simulation] is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. ... It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*.”⁶⁰⁵ The digital world allows for a multitude of realities, hyperreal maps whose creators are more often than not masked behind computer screens, video cameras, or the keystrokes of a blog. Realities compete with terms like “official music video,” “the *real* Rupee,” or even the change of name from Barbados Board of Tourism to the Barbados Tourism *Authority*. These official, real, authoritative titles declare a reality whose production is absented from the representation.⁶⁰⁶ Rather than a clear signified, these hyperreal images become “real” through repeated representation rather than a clear referent.

For a nation that is still struggling to define an independent national culture and postcolonial identity, controlling discourses of what is “real” and/or authentic is a matter of cultural survival. For centuries the dominant imaginary of Barbados was “Little England,” the smaller representation of a powerful empire. In moving away from that imaginary, the nation has relied on regional and diasporic histories to redefine itself. In attempting to survive economically as an independent nation it has used all of these histories to market Barbadian culture within the global economy. This too, draws on Barbados’s history as part of the region that produces “the Caribbean island [that] is one of the first ‘global icons’ ... to encapsulate modernity, enfolding within itself a deep history of relations of consumption, luxury, and privilege for some.”⁶⁰⁷ Consumption and iconicity have been an important part of the struggle for global recognition throughout the island’s history.⁶⁰⁸ Even as an independent nation, the island still seeks to prove its modernity to the rest of the world and to its own citizens. The modern independent ideal of the nation relies heavily on imported commodities and ideologies.⁶⁰⁹ The material realm of commodity allows for tangible constructions of a “real” Barbados.

The constant creation and re-creation of a “real” Barbados based on divergent histories and a globally influenced present changes understandings of an “authentic” Barbadian nation in a way that leads to an idealized past through which the future is then projected. Performing the Barbadian personality requires sincerity, then, because the “real” and “authentic” are too unstable to prove and are built on a past that no longer exists. Baudrillard explains: “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.”⁶¹⁰ The longing for the past, for when the “yute wan’t so,”⁶¹¹ for simpler times, is the promotion of an idealized past. It allows one to look at high unemployment rates and forget that unemployment and underemployment have long been a part of Barbadian reality. It allows critics to lament an indiscriminate embrace of Jamaican dub culture, U.S. and U.K. hip hop and pop music while forgetting the influence of Trinidadian calypso, roots reggae, and U.S. soul. All of these things are and have been a part of Barbadian reality, but the production of a “real” Barbadian culture has no place for these things

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁰⁶ See Mulvey, “Xala, Ousmane Sembene 1976.”

⁶⁰⁷ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 37.

⁶⁰⁸ See Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*; Thompson, *Eye on the Tropics*.

⁶⁰⁹ See Friedman, *Consumption and Identity*; Howes, *Cross-Cultural Consumption*.

⁶¹⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

⁶¹¹ One site of social commentary is the comic strip. One popular strip written by Mike Nurse is titled “How de yute get so” and comments exclusively on the values and behaviors of Barbadian youth.

even as it relies on them. The hyperreal reflects, creates, and promotes an “authentic” Barbadian context, one that may or may not have ever existed. Baudrillard explains:

Whence the characteristic hysteria of our times: that of the production and reproduction of the real. The other production, that of values and commodities, that of the belle époque of political economy, has for a long time had no specific meaning. What every society looks for in continuing to reproduce, and to overproduce, is to restore the real that escapes it. That is why *today this ‘material’ production is that of the hyperreal itself.*⁶¹²

For the Caribbean region in particular such invention and material production have a long history. Krista Thompson shows how “colonial representations were frequently not just reflective of colonial views but became constitutive and iconic parts of the colonies’ landscape.”⁶¹³ Since the seventeenth century the material reality of the Caribbean has been invented for a raced and classed elite to enjoy, while the masses have worked to both find and maintain this elusive ideal of paradise. Thompson goes on to show how marketing the Caribbean as a pre-modern paradise brought modern tourism as a development scheme creating a delicate balance between modern amenities for some and the preservation of the picturesque which relied upon, policed, and excluded most others.⁶¹⁴ The ideals of material consumption and the Caribbean imaginary that they are based upon both search for “the real that escapes” them.⁶¹⁵

The invention of the very idea of the Caribbean is rooted in material practices of consumption.⁶¹⁶ Thus, these same practices create and perpetuate a hyperreal imaginary. Nostalgia exists as mourning the loss of a reality that never was, but one wishes one could return to. It creates an “authentic” ideal that sincerity can never live up to. Striving for a non-existent past in order to map a yet to exist future, nostalgia fuels itself on its own hyperreality, especially in this digital age where the transfer of knowledge, images, and commodities exacerbates the fluidity of identity construction. The number of ways in which one can identify and construct narratives of identity makes the search for a “real” origin even more pressing. As Stuart Hall notes “who has not known, at this moment, the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for ‘times past’? And yet, this ‘return to the beginning’ is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, or representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery.”⁶¹⁷

Representation, like self-definition, is a site of power. Global theorist Arjun Appadurai understands the ways in which semiotics, politics, and social identity work together in the form of the image. He writes “The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as social practice.*”⁶¹⁸ The constant redefinition of what is “real” and the growing number of ways of representing the “real” is a practice of society. It is a way to define, assert control and ownership over, and police an imagined community. The level of image is where Barbadians are able to capitalize on historical myths of the Caribbean as exotic, erotic, leisure paradise and redeploy

⁶¹² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 23.

⁶¹³ Thompson, *Eye for the Tropics*, 10.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶¹⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 23.

⁶¹⁶ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 8.

⁶¹⁷ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 245.

⁶¹⁸ Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 29.

them in the twenty-first century representing the nation as modern, developed, yet still fun, relaxing, and sensual. Both the state and Barbadians themselves encourage and perform such representations. Art mimics life and life mimics art in a hyperreal continuum that comes to define both the validity of the art and the “authenticity” or “realness” of life. One proves one’s sincerity by engaging in this process, one that can never quite be completed.

Hyperreality, though, is based on the idea that a real once existed, or at least that it was once believed in. How do we then discern between reality and hyperreality, the past and nostalgia? Lawrence Grossberg writes that although Baudrillard’s analysis is useful, it is perhaps not as all-encompassing as it seems. He says “Echoing [Stuart] Hall, if reality was never as real as we have constructed it, it’s not quite as unreal as we imagine it; if subjectivity was never as coherent as we imagine it, it’s not quite as incoherent as we fantasize it; and if power was never as simple or monolithic as we fantasize it . . . its’ not quite as dispersed and unchallengeable as we fear.”⁶¹⁹ This challenge can be found in historical practices of self-definition, which in the twenty-first century include redefinitions of home. The technologies of the moment provide a safe space for Appadurai’s “imagination as a social practice.”⁶²⁰ They provide new means for one to imagine a sense of home, an imaginary that in diasporic contexts is not wholly tied to geography, and like Glissant’s relational practices allows for identity to be performed through relation rather than solely through a sense of lineage or roots.⁶²¹

Identity is often expressed through notions of one’s roots, tying it to a specific landscape and physical space. We see this in The Might Gabby’s famous calypso “Jack” where he asserts his Barbadian identity in the lyric “my navel string is buried here.”⁶²² But, as noted in Chapter two, Gabby’s Barbadian identity formed through his experiences on and off of the island, suggesting that perhaps Edouard Glissant’s concept of relational identity may be more useful. He says: “When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened.”⁶²³ A change in place need not mark a loss of identity or a complete fissure. When taking into account relation, one can arrive at Glissant’s relational identity where “Identity is no longer just permanence; it is a capacity for variation.”⁶²⁴ Twenty-first century technologies allow for a greater capacity for variation. Identity is not always/only “rooted” in geography, but can be experienced and expressed across multiple “homes” that are in relation to one another.

One might think that a sense of “home” might be troubled by the hyperreality of today’s cultural production, but on the contrary the hyperreal opens new avenues to claim a home and produces new routes of relation. The internet allows for more sites of identification. It is a place where one can find multiple maps over the cultural landscape, some of which lie flat covering cultural and geographic territories like Borges’ map, but others have evolved to create three-dimensional replicas of all things “real.” Here home and away are tied not just through telephone cables, but also through cable lines, wifi connections, and mobile technologies that bring the sounds and sights of “home” to anyone traveling abroad, and constantly bring “away” into the daily routines of home. Travel and migration have always been a constitutive part of

⁶¹⁹ Grossberg, “History, Politics, and Postmodernism,” 169.

⁶²⁰ Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 29.

⁶²¹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.

⁶²² Gabby, “Jack,” *Til Now*.

⁶²³ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 143.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

Barbadian identity, but “the creation of the Internet has helped to bridge the gap between home and away. It has also raised further questions about real and virtual communities and the nation. New technologies have caught up with anxieties about distance, location, space and identity.”⁶²⁵ Does one have to have ever lived at home in order to call it one’s home? The mobility of people, ideas, and commodities that has built the Caribbean is furthered by the ease with which these things travel in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Arjun Appadurai’s breakdown of global cultural flows into ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes is one way to understand the fluidity of culture in today’s historical moment.⁶²⁶

For artists such as Alison Hinds, Rupee, and Rihanna whose careers depend on the global travel of their images and who have strong ties to their specific “home” of Barbados, such global “scapes” characterize both their sense of home and the routes they take in representing it. The conflation between these five scapes – the ways in which technoscapescapes fuel mediascapescapes that depend upon financescapescapes and ideoscapescapes and sometimes produce new ethnoscapescapes – has particular resonance with popular culture artists who in many ways are an important part of today’s global cultural flows. For artists such as Alison Hinds and Rupee who were born in Europe, yet strongly identify Barbados as home and clearly declare that they represent Barbadian culture, these scapes are at the core of their representations of self and community.

The surreality of popular culture presents a new imaginary where one really can “know” Rupee, understand what mood Rihanna is in, or commiserate with Alison Hinds when she is stuck in traffic. Indeed, the line between “real” relationships and the kind of shallow interactions between fan and admired are blurred by what has become the mundane online openness. These realities still allow for privacy. For days or weeks one might step away from twitter or facebook, but previous participation raises the expectation that not only will one return, but one will have an explanation for the absence. Issues of privacy become muddled when one reports hourly everything you do, in a forum where millions of people can (and often do) express an opinion on every detail. The next section will examine the ways that internet blogs complicate identity constructions through such interactions.

“WHERE DEM BLOGGERS AT”⁶²⁷

The Caribbean figured as a dangerous crossroads, is the place where East and West, North and South, Third World and First World, capitalism and communism, global high tech and local poverty, tourists and drug runners, all collide. In this “trafficking” it becomes increasingly less clear what is inside and what is outside, what is pure and what is impure, what is North and what is South, what is local and what is global.⁶²⁸

Mimi Sheller notes how the ways in which the Caribbean region has been consumed within global markets makes the productions of the region dangerous. The region’s popular culture in particular illustrates George Lipsitz’s explanation of the power of popular culture. He writes, “The significance of these seemingly ephemeral works of popular culture goes far beyond

⁶²⁵ Best, *Politics of Caribbean Cyberculture*, 26.

⁶²⁶ Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 31.

⁶²⁷ Rihanna, “Hard,” *Rated R*.

⁶²⁸ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 175.

their role as commodities. The diasporic conversation within ... Black musical forms provides a powerful illustration of the potential for contemporary commercialized leisure to carry images, ideas, and icons of enormous political importance between cultures.”⁶²⁹ The idea of the Caribbean as a dangerous crossroads is furthered within the blogosphere. Throughout history the migration patterns of Caribbean people and thus Caribbean cultures has had a broad impact on global culture especially European and Western sites where Caribbean migrants have created ethnic pockets. Their presence and their influence presents these host communities with a sense of the “real” Caribbean. Sheller explains how “Even without going anywhere, the Europeans and North Americans are increasingly represented as exposed to the creole cultures of the Caribbean, which are infiltrating the metropolis. The music young people listen to, the Jamaica-influenced ‘patois’ spoken on the streets, the significance of Caribbean carnivals in many major metropolitan areas, all point towards a ‘Caribbeanization’ of global culture.”⁶³⁰ Such “Caribbeanization” happens on small scales within interpersonal relationships,⁶³¹ but it also reaches larger scales as cultural representatives with large (online) followings begin to use blogs and (interpersonal communication) sites to “reach out” to fans. Such availability through the likes of twitter, facebook, and blog sites creates what Leisa Reichelt has termed ambient intimacy.⁶³² The constant flow of details creates a specific intimacy between users, even across physical and cultural distance.

Part of Sheller’s argument is that Caribbeanization allows non-Caribbean peoples to feel as though they have an intimate knowledge of the region through consuming the language, culture, and products of the Caribbean. Communication technologies like twitter, facebook, blogs, and the many material devices that support them allow for a new kind of intimacy. Leisa Reichelt has termed such communication “ambient intimacy.” She writes, “Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible.”⁶³³ Now it is not only mass-produced cultural production or the lived experiences of Caribbean people that mark the Caribbean as a dangerous crossroads, it is also the mundane trivialities that appear on mobile devices and computer screens. These intimate details allow people to feel at “home” with one another, and for celebrities who use them to reach out to fans they are yet another way for the Caribbean to be consumed. As Sheller points out, “Consumption, in other words, is never innocent: it changes the consumer.”⁶³⁴

When an individual creates a public identity, one that is consumable, interactive, and ever present via twitter, facebook, and a host of news and fan sites that follow one’s every move, her/his “real” identity cannot help but be contested within that individual’s own publicity. Rihanna serves as a pop culture icon. She represents Barbados through the sheer coincidence of her popularity and her nationality, but she also stands in for young (black) women, youth culture, and popular culture. This is a lot of weight to hold and in the digital arena in particular it invites a host of voices and opinions. After Rihanna was assaulted in 2009, fans and critics alike gave their opinions on what “really” happened and what Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty should do. The assault blurred the line between Rihanna as pop icon and Robyn as young woman in ways that

⁶²⁹ Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 27.

⁶³⁰ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 179.

⁶³¹ See Miller and Slater, *The Internet*.

⁶³² Reichelt, “Ambient Intimacy.”

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 81.

neither identity was quite prepared for. One particular comment brought this to light. Rihanna noted how

“A lot of people get so brave behind the computer screen,” she says today. “I get it – she’s a blogger, whatever. But when she started jumping to conclusions about my personal decision, it really pissed me off.”⁶³⁵

Rihanna’s stardom came with enormous amounts of publicity. The space of internet blogs blurred the lines between public and private (if they ever existed), but not the emotional connection to the idea of privacy. The anonymity of blogging created a power differential that was uncomfortable for Rihanna as a star and presumably as a person. Anybody could add their voice to the chorus through a screen name that ultimately does not identify her or him, but the content of the post is specifically about one identifiable person, in this case Rihanna. By calling out this particular blogger, Rihanna is reasserting her right to define her “self,” especially her “real” personal self that is supposed to exist outside of the maelstrom of her public persona.

This sense of “real”ness is manifested much more clearly after 2009 when Rihanna begins to present what she called the “real” Rihanna using the same technologies that had enabled people to criticize her. She took over her twitter account giving fans a sense of access to her by posting mundane details of her day providing an intimate connection. At the same time she drew a distinction in interviews between the “real” Rihanna that she offered via social media and the characters she played in her stage shows and videos. The distinction she has tried to make, however still gets blurred when she is overtly representing the nation. Much of the anxiety surrounding her relationship with the Barbadian state centers on whether it is Robyn Fenty (who grew up in the parish of St. Michael and attended Combermere secondary school), the “real” Rihanna of her twitter feed (which features content that many Barbadians find objectionable),⁶³⁶ or one of the many characters of her videos who is representing the nation in tourism commercials, print advertisements, and as a Cultural Ambassador?

Other “home-grown” artists are rarely held up to the same kind of scrutiny. This may be a matter of the different levels of celebrity, or perhaps for artists who not only grew up on the island, but grew as performers on Barbados’s stages, their Barbadian audiences feel they already know them. Having seen their “real” faces on Barbadian stages there is an assumption of intimacy that becomes a part of the artist’s public persona as they reach out to audiences across the world.

For example, Rupee began performing in Barbados’s Richard Stoute Teen Talent show before gracing the stages of Crop Over, releasing three albums locally, and eventually signing to a major U.S.-based label. Rupee’s reputation, and thus his career, benefited greatly from his online interactions with his fans where he strives to create a sense of intimacy between him and his audience blurring the line between fan and friend. With his third self released album, he released his own website thisisrupee.com. When asked why it was important for him to have that avenue of interaction with fans he says,

⁶³⁵ Ellis, “Queen of Pain,” 80.

⁶³⁶ Many of the objections come from Rihanna’s discussions, images, and usage of marijuana and how, as a Cultural Ambassador, her twitter feed may reflect on the island as a whole. One example is when Rihanna tweeted an image of marijuana and subsequently on the CBS morning show *The Talk*, Sharon Osbourne said, “It is understandable because she is from Barbados and everyone there smokes marijuana” (Smith, “Bajans Upset”).

Essentially, we are in the internet age, you know, and naturally it was very important for me to have a web presence. So we set up thisisrupee.com quite a few years ago, and it was very, very efficient in bringing people together from all over the world. It was definitely like a small community and it spawned the Rupee's angels, a real dedicated group of fans who support me wherever I go. And it was a good means of interacting with fans and letting people know who I am and what I'm about, what the music is about, what the mission is about.⁶³⁷

In this way Rupee uses his internet presence to create a sense of intimacy between him and his audience. His openness creates a group of fans, Rupee's angels, who then support him offline at his shows and know him well enough to answer questions other fans may have online. This intimacy then creates a sense of community, one which is not based (necessarily) on geography but makes Rupee's music central to the interactions of a diverse audience of individuals around the world. He has carefully managed his internet presence over the years, closing his stand alone website when the popularity of that form declined. He now uses facebook and twitter to interact with fans and friends. He has a Rupee fan page on facebook and his own personal page of Rupert Clark.⁶³⁸ He enacts his reputation as "the real Rupee," however, by posting simultaneously to the various social media. Thousands of his facebook fans have access to both of his pages, and it is not uncommon for him to post the same content to both sites.

Keeping up with the new technology is not easy and at times affects public image as Rupee found out. Just days after announcing his twitter account, and after making a few corny jokes, he made this apology to fan and female emcee, zoifemcee: "clearly the novelty of this thing is obscuring my swag...forgive me ☺." In entering into the learning curve of using new communication technology, Rupee had inadvertently altered the persona he wished to present to the rest of the world. Even after fully embracing the technology and getting quite comfortable with its use, over use has its downsides as Rupee notes in this 2011 message:

I use touch-screen devices so much now that I find myself ever so often, touching my laptop screen to get things done! #dididothat #lol⁶³⁹

This, like many posts, is one that integrates the use of sites, being posted on twitter and facebook simultaneously. Here he has not only embraced the technology, but perhaps also the awkwardness that can arise from its use. In exposing himself in these ways he further blurs the line between person and persona, real and hyperreal, as his online and public persona is constantly engaging in ways an audience expects a person—not just a star or representation—would. Part of his performance includes giving his audience a backstage view (even if the backstage is also a construction).⁶⁴⁰

Through videos such as "Cheers" and "Tempted to Touch," Rupee's activism and lyrical content, and Rihanna's deals with the Barbados Tourism Authority, these two artists represent the nation of Barbados even as they set out to further their own individual careers. Comments

⁶³⁷ Clarke, interview with author.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Rupee's facebook page, accessed January 30, 2011. <https://www.facebook.com/TheRealRupee?fref=ts>.

⁶⁴⁰ For a discussion of the distinction between front and backstage see Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 111-35.

surrounding their online presences inevitably include statements of national pride and/or critiques based on the national interests of their representations of Barbados. Online use increases the availability of information, produces more opportunities for critique, and provides more opportunities to connect. Such opportunities do not automatically create new or different relationships or meanings. Baudrillard contends that “We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.”⁶⁴¹ Perhaps the *possibility* of creating meaning in new sites has become more important than the meaning itself at this stage. The various sites of connection provide a network, but the problem is that the success of a network is in its spread not in whether it has achieved its original goal. The possibility of spreading information becomes more important than whether the audience gets the message.⁶⁴² But what does that then “mean” for national identities represented in new and old ways?

OLD SIGHTS AND NEW VISIONS

There’s a difference between people who have sight and people who have vision.⁶⁴³

It appeared to me that the political leaders of the day were lacking vision, unable or unwilling to galvanize and unite the people behind a single idea or concept, such as how independence was more than just an idea, but also a reason for enduring tough times because independence promised a better day. It raised expectations, even if the expectations were different from person to person, from class to class. At least everybody seemed to be talking about even working for the same purpose.⁶⁴⁴

The expectations of Barbadian independence have, like in many new nation-states, yet to be fully realized. A generation of Bajans set their sights on creating an autonomous, proud, industrious nation full of the cultural complexity of its history and ready to negotiate a socially global world of politics, economics, culture and ideology. They set out on the journey toward independence backed by their own local history and circumstances and the growing independence/nationalist movements throughout the region, the African diaspora, and the broader colonial world. The nationalism, however, became subsumed by its own representations, by looking like a nation rather than performing nationhood.⁶⁴⁵ As noted in earlier chapters, brand Barbados was the product. If Barbados’s political leaders could not proffer a distinct vision for an independent nation, they could create a salable, consumable image of Barbados, one reliant on and attractive to African/Caribbean diasporas and the global culture industry. Relying on iconicity, brand Barbados presented an image rather than a vision. It was a representation without a clear referent, a mythical modern island paradise cloaked in hyperreality. Ironically, even as products within brand Barbados, many Barbadian artists do proffer a vision of the independent nation, one that, like the rhetoric of the independence and

⁶⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 79.

⁶⁴² Chun, “Imagined Networks.”

⁶⁴³ Clarke, interview with Andre C.Y. Choo Quan.

⁶⁴⁴ Foster, *Island Wings*, 310.

⁶⁴⁵ This is akin to what Erving Goffman calls “make-work.” See Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 109-111.

nationalist movements is reliant on regionalism and transnationalism and extends to include the new audiences that twenty-first century technology provides.

Alison Hinds's career is but one representation of this phenomenon of old sights moving toward new visions. Her early work with Square One was firmly entrenched within regionalism and an African diasporic consciousness while offering a soundtrack to peace based on common humanity. Songs such as "Faluma," "Togetherness," "Fireworks" seek to build community across national boundaries through using language indigenous to other Caribbean neighbors in "Faluma," declarations of unity in "Togetherness," and global critiques of war and conflict at home and abroad in "Fireworks." Hinds has come to use the internet, specifically her stand alone website alisonhinds.com, twitter, and facebook to connect with her audiences. In tweeting her daily activities, promoting her upcoming appearances and posting "flashbacks" like these songs and old photos she builds not only ambient intimacy but a community based on commonality. She uses her specific experiences to reach out to a broader audience.

On her first solo album *Soca Queen* Alison Hinds melds the specificity of being an "Island Girl"⁶⁴⁶ with the possibility of entering a broader market. With "The Show" Alison replaces big names in the industry such as Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez by introducing the song with

Beyoncé can't make it tonight
 She musta hear about Alison Hinds
 Beyoncé couldn't make it tonight
 Tonight is Caribbean wine
 JLo couldn't make it tonight
 Tonight you have Alison Hinds
 None of them could make it tonight
 So here we go, here we go⁶⁴⁷

Set to a Caribbean rhythm laid under the melody that opens "Are You My Woman" (by American soul group the Chi-lites and sampled by Beyoncé in her 2003 song "Crazy in Love"), Hinds's self-placement is not only a way for her to declare her place on the world stage after a brief hiatus, she is also articulating that she has (or should have) the same status as the pop icons she mentions. She makes these claims based on her ability to perform the Caribbean wine, a specific form of a diasporic performance idiom that places emphasis on the movement of the hips and buttocks. Her comparison to these specific artists is important because they are also known for their movement, their bodies, and their mastery of each within specific realms of performance. Musically the song draws on a local rhythm interspersed with Diana Ross's 1980 hit "I'm Coming Out," going back to Hinds's performance roots where she began performing pop, R&B, and reggae covers on the Barbadian hotel circuit.

On the same album, Hinds debuts "My Space," which uses the then popular social networking site as a party promotion. Here globalization is a site for fun.⁶⁴⁸ The theme of music bringing people together across the world is made explicit and specific in the reference to the site myspace.com. The title tells of a new vision for Hinds's career and the culture that she

⁶⁴⁶ Hinds, "Island Girl." *Soca Queen; Caribbean Queen*.

⁶⁴⁷ Hinds, "The Show." *Soca Queen*.

⁶⁴⁸ Special thanks to Selam Minaye for the conversations that brought me to this point/specific language.

represents. An alternate reading of the title “*My Space*” shows how every place the music touches is a site that belongs to the singer. The ubiquity of the music and the internet site that it references allows for new visions of travel and cultural influence. She sings “All my crew who coming through/ raise your hand, raise your hand/show your face if you’re on my.space/ wine your waist in the place,” establishing a community of music lovers and internet users. She ends the song saying “myspace.com/Alison Hinds, that’s where you can find me, and in the party, and in the fete,” using the song as both a practice of Caribbean culture and an advertisement for it. Such uses are still based on an image of the Caribbean as fun, as leisure.

This kind of interactivity between fans and artists, between advertisements and communication/performance takes a different form in Nivea’s 2011 advertising campaign.⁶⁴⁹ With Rihanna as the face of the campaign, Nivea exhausted their advertising options using digital technology as much as possible. One of the methods they used was an augmented reality campaign where users could buy a special tin of Nivea Crème or download a coded image from Nivea’s site. When held up to a webcam Rihanna holographically appears singing her 2011 single “California King.” Consumers can literally hold one of the world’s most popular pop stars in their hands while performing a daily ritual of cosmetic hygiene. It really is Rihanna’s voice that digitally sings “there’s more than distance between us.” She is available inviting the consumer to follow her through a web of white linens into a sky blue background, but only as a holograph. In a song of failing romance she both invites the consumer and distances them.

Rihanna’s Barbadian heritage is not referenced in the campaign, but she follows in a tradition of Caribbean consumption based on new technology. Like the postcard of the late

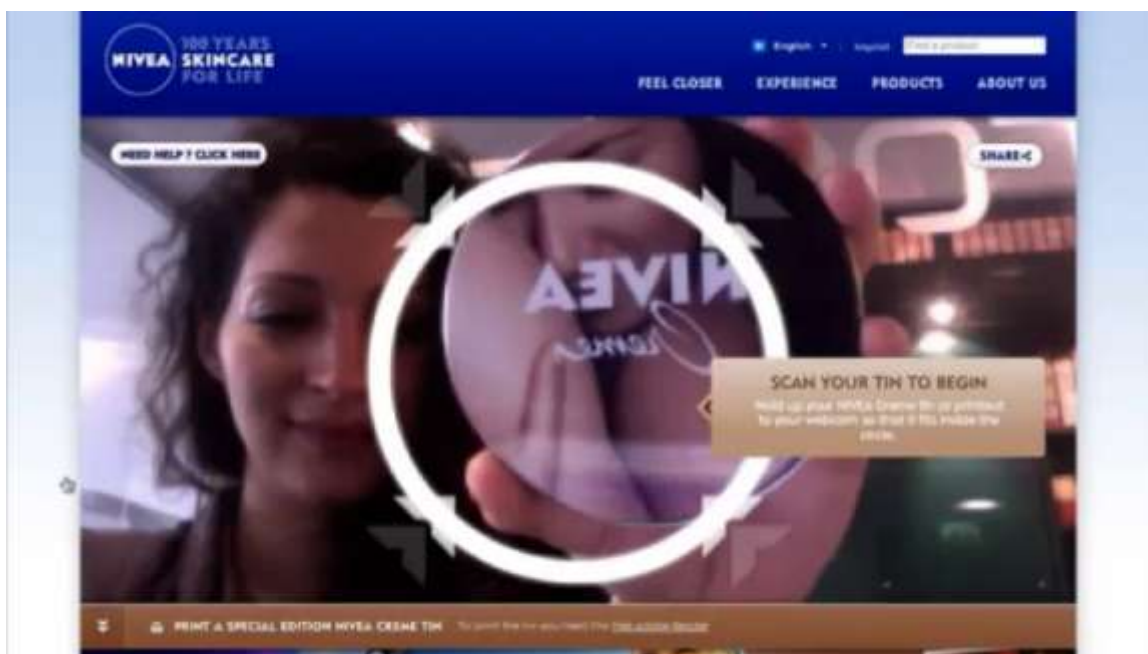


Figure 6.1

⁶⁴⁹ “NIVEA Kicks Off.”

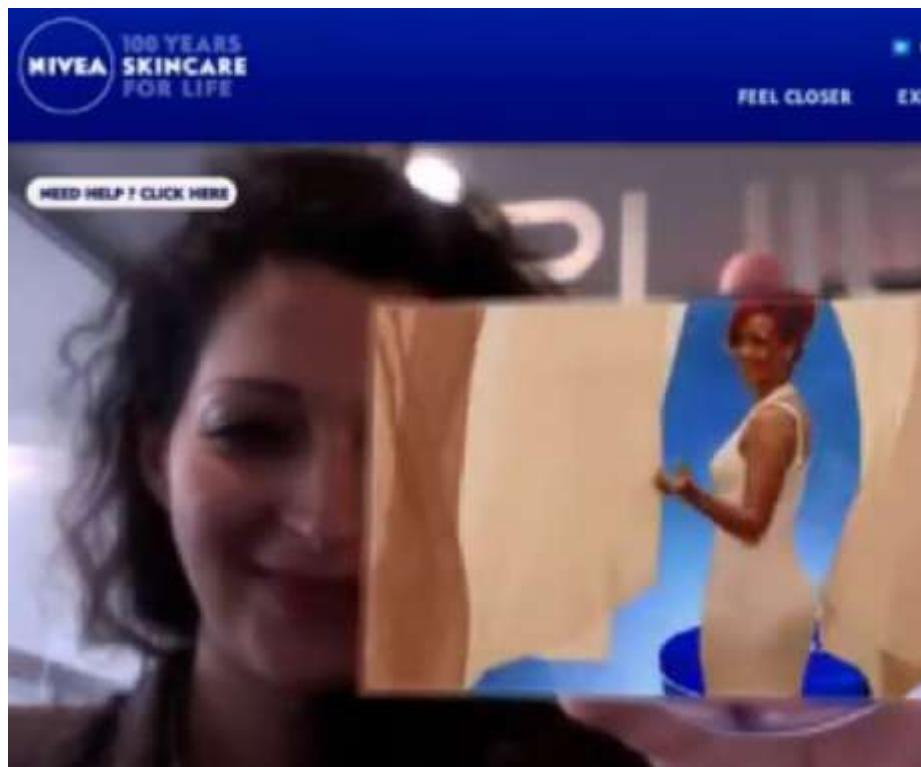


Figure 6.2

nineteenth century, this example of augmented reality creates a tangible, consumable product. Unlike the static photograph at the base of a postcard, here Rihanna performs, coming to life—an alternate, digitally produced, hyperreal life—in one’s hand. A tin for cosmetics becomes a twenty-first century music box, except instead of a familiar song that holds the power of nostalgia, it produces a visible, specific figure.

The internet and other new technologies support not only nostalgia, but the material histories that sustain it, as well as providing a space for new imaginaries of Barbadian representation to form and be performed. Rupee’s 2011 hit “I Am a Bajan” is more than a lyrical declaration of national pride. Rupee donated a portion of the proceeds of sales to the National Trust, which maintains historical sites on the island along with providing other services based on preserving the island and its culture. Selling the single through itunes, Rupee was able to appeal to a larger audience. The larger network buying the song, need not understand its message in order to accomplish Rupee’s goal of promoting and supporting the nation. Meanwhile a host of young Barbadian performers have used the internet to jumpstart their careers. Much like Rupee, crooner Hal Linton had his own website and released his music locally before signing with Motown Records. Even after breaking with the label he still promotes his brand of soul/pop/R&B through sites such as soundcloud while promoting his new music through facebook. White Barbadian soul singer Simon Pipe released his first video via the internet making nostalgic scenes of Barbados’s eastern coast a central part of the visual image. Vita Chambers updates her fans on her rock/pop music uploading images of her opening for Justin Beiber, promoting videos before their release, and offering prizes for online contests. Blonde Barbadian country singer Malissa Alanna uploaded her music to bajantube.com before moving to

Nashville to record. And pop group Cover Drive began their career with sessions on a couch that they uploaded to youtube.com before eventually reaching the top of the British charts.

Each of the above-named artists has built on national, racial, cultural, and musical images that existed before them. They have used contemporary technologies and centuries old routes of travel to turn their musical dreams into realities. They may not fit into a recognizable Barbadian ideal, but in performing in the genres of rock, R&B, country, jazz, and pop they represent a changing same of Barbados echoing back the multitude of cultural influences that flow in, out, and through the island. The pride of Barbadian nationhood has been spread across geographies, airwaves, and cyberspace. The twenty-first century has brought even more economic hardships, cultural debates and political battles providing an ever-shifting foundation on which to continue to build Barbadian pride. The Barbadian nation is moving away from its old identity as “Little England,” and something more has been accomplished through the performance of a national ideal, such that the boundaries between ideal and real have become much less significant. A world without such boundaries can be scary and uncertain, but just as the history of Barbados has been recorded through the voices of its artists, the future lies in new melodies. That initial meeting of Africa, Asia, and Europe that created the Caribbean is still at the heart of struggles for self-identification and self-governance in the region. But the success of individual artists, and the ways in which they have been able to translate such successes to the nation provide hope that new identities may yet be able to bear the weight of their histories. Barbados’s history is a complex and heavy one, but the innovation of its artists is inspiring, and as Barbadian poet, cultural critic, and theorist Kamau Brathwaite once wrote

sun coming up
and the drummers are praising me

out of the dark
and the dumb gods are raising me

up
up
up

and the music is saving me⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁵⁰ Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, 195.

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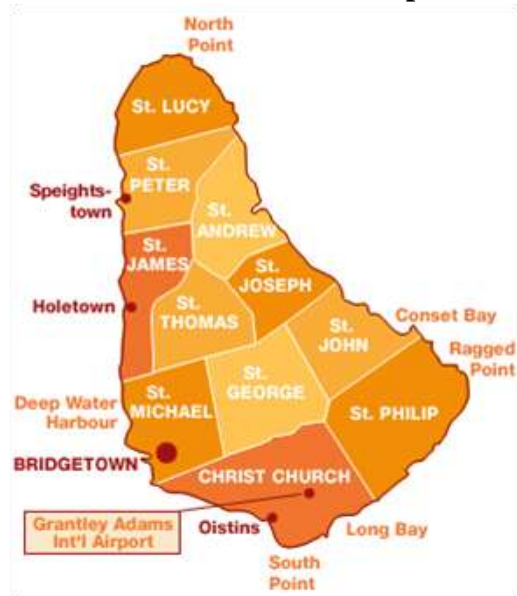
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Appendix

Barbados Political Map



Barbados National Flag



The colors of the flag stand for the sky, sand, and sea, while the broken trident in the center represents the break with the British monarchy

Barbados National Motto Pride and Industry

Barbados Coat of Arms



The shield of the Barbados Coat of Arms features two Pride of Barbados flowers (the national flower) and a bearded fig tree, which was common on the island at the time of its initial settlement. The figure on the left represents the fishing industry. The figure on the right represents Pelican Island, which was once its own small territory off the coast of Bridgetown, the nation's capital. It has since been incorporated into the mainland. Above the shield the hand of a black Barbadian yields two sugar canes representing the cane industry in the form of a cross.

Barbados Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to my country, Barbados, and to the flag, to uphold and defend its honor and to do credit to my nation wherever I may go.

Barbados National Anthem

In plenty and in time of need when this fair land was young
 Our great forefathers sowed the seed from which our pride has sprung
 A pride that makes no wanton boast of what it has withstood
 That binds our hearts from coast to coast, the pride of nationhood

We loyal sons and daughters all do hereby make it known
 These fields and hills beyond recall are now our very own.
 We write our name on history's page with expectations great
 Strict guardians of our heritage firm craftsmen of our fate

The Lord has been the people's guide for the past 300 years
 And with Him still on the people's side we have no doubts or fears
 Upward and onward we shall go, inspiring, exalting, free
 And greater will our nation grow in strength and unity