

# The Translation of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago: The Evolution of a Festival

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**Abstract:** Carnival as a medium of cultural expression is a festival that has existed in various forms around the world. In this article, the author examines Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago through the lens of Translation Studies. Can a cultural object such as a festival be described as a translation? Drawing on Toury's descriptive translation model and on his broad notion of translation as any process that crosses systemic boundaries, on Fernando Ortiz's notion of transculturation and on Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, the author explores how the process of the evolution of Carnival parallels the process of the translation of a text, concluding ultimately that this evolution is in fact not just a process of translation, but one of transculturation.

**Key-words:** Carnival; festival; translation; transculturation; Trinidad and Tobago

**Résumé :** Le carnaval, comme moyen d'expression culturelle, est un festival qui prend des formes différentes à travers le monde. Dans cet article, l'auteure étudie le carnaval à Trinidad et Tobago sous l'optique de la traductologie. Peut-on qualifier un tel objet culturel de traduction ? S'inspirant de Gideon Toury —notamment de sa définition de la traduction comme tout procédé qui traverse des frontières systémiques et des études descriptives de la traduction—, du concept de transculturation proposé par Fernando Ortiz et de la théorie des polysystèmes d'Itamar Even Zohar, l'auteure compare l'évolution du carnaval à la traduction d'un texte et conclut qu'il ne s'agit pas d'un simple processus de traduction, mais de transculturation.

**Mots-clés:** Le Carnaval; festival; traduction; transculturation; Trinidad et Tobago

**Resumo:** O carnaval como um meio de expressão cultural é um festival que existe em diversas formas pelo mundo todo. Neste artigo, a autora examina o carnaval em Trinidad e Tobago através da lente dos estudos da tradução. Um objeto cultural como um festival ser descrito como uma tradução? Para explorar a maneira como o processo de evolução do carnaval se assemelha ao processo de tradução de um texto, a autora se baseia na ampla noção de tradução como qualquer processo que ultrapasse fronteiras sistêmicas, proposta por Toury, além de no modelo descritivo de tradução de Toury, no conceito de transculturação de Fernando Ortiz e na teoria dos polissistemas de Even-Zohar. Por fim, conclui que essa evolução na verdade não é um simples processo de tradução, mas de transculturação.

**Palavras-chave:** carnaval; festival; tradução; transculturação; Trinidad e Tobago

**Resumen:** Como medio de expresión cultural, el carnaval es un festival que ha existido históricamente, en formas diversas, en varios lugares del mundo. La autora presenta su estudio sobre el Carnaval de Trinidad y Tobago a través de una perspectiva basada en los estudios de traducción. Se plantea la pregunta general de si un objeto cultural como lo es un festival puede describirse como traducción. A continuación aborda el estudio desde una base teórica basada en la definición de Gideon Toury de la traducción como proceso de cruce entre fronteras sistémicas y su propuesta del modelo descriptivo aplicado a la traducción, así como también en la noción de transculturación de Fernando Ortiz y la teoría de los polisistemas de Itamar Even-Zohar. La autora compara el proceso de evolución del carnaval con el proceso de traducción de un texto, para concluir que, más que a una traducción, dicha evolución se acerca al proceso de transculturación.

**Palabras clave:** carnaval; festival; traducción; transculturación; Trinidad y Tobago

Works of art are elaborate mechanisms for designing social relationships, sustaining social rules and strengthening social values [...] The central connection between art and collective life lies on a semiotic plane. (Geertz 1478)

## Introduction

Rex Nettleford observes that in the “Commonwealth Caribbean, the idea of festival remains a vehicle for communicating and affirming values and for strengthening the bonds in the new society, but it has changed somewhat through a transformation from colonial fiefs to independent modern politics” (183). The notion of transformation that is central to this observation resonates with Gideon Toury’s broad definition of translation as an “act (or a process) which is performed (or occurs) over and across systemic borders” and is a process in which “one semiotic entity [...] is transformed into another semiotic entity” (qtd. in Sebeok 1112). Inadequate though Toury’s definition is in attempting to present a universal conceptualization of translation, it does allow for the process to exist outside of the realm of text. In Toury’s definition, an object that becomes another object through a series of processes without the complete loss of its semiotic content has undergone translation.

While Geertz’s discussion does not specifically include festivals, he views Moroccan oral poetry, for example, as a semiotic system in the same way that he does visual arts (1488). The breadth of his perspective with regard to performance as art allows for the inclusion of festivals such as Carnival. Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago is a cultural object, a meaning-making practice that has crossed cultural, historical and social boundaries. In this way, Carnival can be considered a translated object. In this article I aim to investigate this translation process. I will begin by examining the origins of Carnival. I will then explore the evolution of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. Finally, I will discuss this evolution by drawing on a combination of concepts from Descriptive Translation Studies (Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury) and the notion of transculturation elaborated by Fernando Ortiz.

## The Origins of Carnival

The word “Carnival” may have come from the Latin term *carnem levare*, meaning “the putting away or removal of flesh (as food)”; the word may also have originated in the Latin phrase *carrus navalis*, referring to the ship that was rolled on a cart through the streets during the celebration of the Isis festival (Rector 39). Rector notes that the Greeks celebrated Carnival as early as 1100 BCE, as a form of worship of Isis, the goddess of fertility in Egyptian mythology (38). Likewise, Robert Tallant traces the origins of Carnival to spring festivals celebrating the fertility of the earth in ancient Greece and Egypt. He describes them as “the beginning of feasting”, to celebrate the end of the lean winter months rather than the “feast before a fast” (83) which it became in later incarnations in Europe. This Greek tradition was transported to Rome, where the Luperci – the priests of the Roman god Faunus (Pan to the Greeks) – hosted the Lupercalia, a festival that was part of a formal religious ritual that included mild flagellation with goatskin whips for the remission of sin (83). As Rome grew wealthier and more powerful, these festivities were

characterized by “libertinism, feast, banquet and orgy”, (38-39). What was originally a religious festival that celebrated the fertility of the earth, and which had been converted into a ceremony that sought absolution for its devotees, degenerated into a predominantly secular celebration that lost all vestiges of spirituality and became Rome’s most popular holiday.

There were gradual but significant changes in the celebration of Carnival with the advent of Christianity in Europe. The Church faced a monumental task in trying to completely eliminate the festivities, an endeavor in which it failed. It eventually resorted to a compromise of reform. The three-day period preceding the beginning of the Lenten season was sanctioned by the Church as a sort of “last fling before the fast” (Liverpool 85). Counterfeiting or the doctrine of ‘accommodation’ was a common practice of the Christian Church. Ancient pagan festivals were given Christian names and Christian significance to make them more palatable to those members of society who expressed repugnance for the licentiousness, debauchery and violence that characterized the festivities. Role reversal was a common feature of Carnival; there was reversal of gender, of class and of social roles – women dressed as men and vice versa, peasants decked out as nobles. Masking and costuming gave the wearer anonymity, invisibility and a license to act with a measure of impunity.

According to Peter Burke, Carnival was the most popular festival in southern Europe in the Early Modern period; it was a “privileged time when what oft was thought could for once be expressed with relative impunity” (184). Carnivals possessed features that were unique to each regional celebration, but there were certain common features as well.

Generally, Carnival began in December or early January and built up in intensity until the start of the Lenten season. Typical features of most Carnival celebrations included masking and costuming, fancy dress, processions, singing and dancing in the streets, role reversals and competitions. In addition, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the celebration was marked by the appearance of floats drawn on carts in Nuremberg and in Florence (Burke 184). Carnival was street theatre; the performers engaged in mock fights, sieges, weddings and other elements of everyday life. Their performance was structured around three main themes: food, sex and violence (186). Food was a significant part of the festivities and there was heavy consumption of pork, beef and other meats. There was a myriad of interesting ways in which sex could be depicted both visually and in song or verse: phallic symbols abounded in the traditions of masking, costuming and in float design; songs with double meanings were encouraged. Verbal aggression was “licensed”; violence was “sublimated into ritual” through activities such as the mock battles and fights, although there are also many documented instances in which serious violence occurred (186-187). Carnival was a “time of institutionalised disorder” (190). In Early Modern Europe, Carnival had three main functions: (1) as entertainment; (2) as an expression of community solidarity; and (3) as a sort of “safety valve” to decrease “sexual and aggressive impulses” and to stem off possible revolts by the peasantry (202).

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Carnival continued to take place in Italy, Spain and France, as well as in Geneva, Vienna, Warsaw and certain German towns. In France, the Courts of Louis XIV and Louis XV were well known for their love of elaborate masks and costumes; grand processions and masked balls were commonplace (Liverpool 86). However, the Revolution of 1789 banned the use of masks and costumes, deeming such practices unbecoming of a French citizen (Tallant 92). The French royalists who fled to the Caribbean to escape the Revolution took with them all of

these elements of their carnival tradition.

Like the French, the other groups who migrated or were brought to the Caribbean during the period of colonization (the African slaves and the East Indian indentured workers, for example) carried with them their various festival legacies (Liverpool 57). In the nineteenth century, French and Spanish planters who had settled in Trinidad and Tobago held masked balls, dinners, and paid house calls on friends and neighbors from Christmas until Ash Wednesday. The English celebrations were more sober, although they had a tradition of Harvest festivals that included parades, balls and various tournaments.

The Africans brought to the Caribbean from the West Coast of Africa and the Congo did not constitute a homogeneous group; they came from various social and political strata and represented a wide range of linguistic and cultural forms (Liverpool 56-57). They therefore brought with them an extensive array of cultural practices that included aesthetics of music, parades, masking and costuming. Thompson comments on certain features of festival arts in the Caribbean that “betray descent from African-influenced aesthetics”; these include “call-and-response” and “battles of virtuosity between two singers or two dance groups” (19). Yoruba and Congo customs of parades and processions, which became fused in the Caribbean (20) and which are implied in the celebrations of certain Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian syncretic religions (23), were initially practiced in order to promote good fortune, healing, happiness and goodwill, as well as to bring ancestral power back to the center. “Traditional Yoruba”, Thompson notes, has “rich associations linking masking to the power and presence of the dead”, of interaction with the “other world” (26). Feathered masks were used by special individuals to connect with a higher power in order to obtain revelations about medicinal remedies for various ailments. Bettelheim, Nunley and Bridges explain how “assemblages” made of “bones, raffia, beads, shells, horns, metal and imported cloth” could be found on a single masquerader (36). These features have endured to various degrees in twentieth and twenty-first century Carnival celebrations, although one cannot automatically ascribe to them the same meaning as that of their African predecessors.

An exploration of the Carnival of Trinidad and Tobago provides an opportunity to determine its position in the cultural polysystem of Trinidad and Tobago, to examine the acceptability or adequacy of Carnival as a translation, to identify the sources and the factors that governed its selection by the target culture and to determine the changes that have taken place in the festival since the early nineteenth century.

### **Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago: An Overview**

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is located at the southern end of the Caribbean chain of islands, approximately 11 kilometers north of the coast of Venezuela; it has an area of 5,155 square kilometers and a population of 1,312,000 people. The largest ethnic groups are of African and East Indian origin; however, the population also includes the descendants of European whites – French, Spanish and British settlers, German, Irish, Corsican, Italian, Portuguese and Scots, as well as Chinese, Lebanese and Syrians (Scher, *Carnival*). Currently, 41% of the population is Indo-Trinidadian, 39% is Afro-Trinidadian and the remaining 20% comprises those of European, Middle Eastern and mixed heritage (Esipsu & Khaquli 52). The linguistic landscape is equally diverse: languages include English, French Creole and Hindi. Arabic, Bhojpuri, Urdu and Yoruba (among others) are used primarily for religious purposes. This brief sketch of the

demographic and linguistic landscapes presents a picture of a complex pattern of interconnected systems.

Carnival is an important subsystem of the cultural polysystem of Trinidad and Tobago. Deeply rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition of pre-Lenten feasting brought to the island by the Spanish and the French, Carnival is “an especially Afro-Trinidadian affair that perplexes or offends some Hindus, Muslims and Pentecostal Christians in Trinidad” (Green & Scher 9), a reflection of the ethnic and religious tensions that have long persisted in Trinidadian society. It is an annual event that takes place officially on the two days immediately preceding Ash Wednesday. It actually begins much earlier, however, in the latter half of the previous year when masquerade (*mas*) bands present their themes and costumes for the next season. Steelband (*pan*) orchestras, calypsonians and *soca* (party music) artists begin composing, arranging and rehearsing for the competitions that are usually held on the weekend leading up to Carnival. Calypso (and *soca*), *mas* and *pan* are the essential components of Carnival and each one functions as a dynamic system that can take many forms (Green and Scher 9-10).

Scher notes that the Carnival season “is the busiest tourist season in Trinidad and marks the height of incoming tourist revenue” (*Carnival* 164). According to the Trinidad & Tobago Coalition of Services Industries (TTCSI), in 2007, some 40,000 carnival visitors spent USD 28 million, accounting for over ten percent of annual visitor expenditures; overseas diaspora carnivals based on the Trinidadian model (numbering more than eighty in Europe and North America) also generate hundreds of millions of dollars (TTCSI 1). It also provides regular employment for a wide cross-section of workers within the industry – designers, musicians, steelpan tuners, calypsonians and *soca* artists – as they are also involved in the production of the diasporic Carnivals throughout Europe and North America.

According to Green and Scher, it is impossible to reduce Carnival to “any kind of singular entity with universally realized qualities and attributes”; they note that “what development bureaucrats, corporate sponsors, political functionaries, culture ministers, *pan* enthusiasts, *mas* players, calypsonians, folks on the street, and scholars may speak of when they say *Carnival* may be quite different from one another” (7). The polysemic nature of the festival is underscored by the fact that it “resonates in myriad ways for different peoples, each engaged in located struggles for economic autonomy, cultural integrity and respect, and political power” (8). Whatever the perception of Carnival by the various individuals or entities, it is difficult to dispute that it is an indicator of social tension and of cultural change, as well as a site for the creation and assertion of identity (Scher, *Carnival* 9). Forged in the crucible of the slave plantations and continually refashioned by various forces over time, the Carnival of Trinidad and Tobago is a reflection of social and cultural reality. It has contributed to the definition of Afro-Trinidadian identity and – since the latter half of the twentieth century – national Trinidadian identity in general. It provides common ground for a pan-Caribbean identity both within the Caribbean basin and in diasporic communities, especially in Europe and North America.

### **Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago: A Brief History**

According to Liverpool, Carnival was first celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago around 1783 with the arrival of the French (82). Their Carnival traditions tended to be less exuberant than those of the islands that were settled permanently by the French; Berrian notes, for example, that the French islands of the Caribbean continue to celebrate a five-day pre-

Lenten Carnival that ends at 7:00 p.m. on Ash Wednesday with the burning of the effigy of Vaval, the Carnival king (138).

In addition to their own traditional instruments – the harpsichord, the piano, the harp and the lyre – the French used the violin, the Spanish guitar, the cuatro, the mandolin and the African drum and shac-shac. They occasionally wore costumes depicting the clothing of “enslaved domestics and field labourers” and their balls and dances featured the dance forms of the latter (Liverpool 127-130); the actions of the French Creoles in adopting some of the traditions of the African slaves were a sort of resistance to the English, who had captured Trinidad and Tobago from the Spanish in 1797. The British regime was repressive: between 1797 and 1826, the French elite were denied “political rights and privileges” (130). Moreover, the Protestant sensibilities of the British made them intolerant of the Carnival revelry and they sought unsuccessfully to “demote” the celebration (Cowley 11). Since many riots and revolts in Europe began on major festivals (Burke 204), the British sought to pre-empt any potential rebellion by allying themselves with the French. Although the latter were politically less powerful than the British, the two groups comprised the plantocracy – the dominant elite of Trinidadian plantation society – and so they presented a “façade of cohesion” to the black slaves (Liverpool 136). In so doing, the English and French attempted to reduce the possibility that the blacks would take advantage of any discord between elites to revolt, since the blacks were “quick to exploit any weakness in the social order” (Cowley 12).

Liverpool points out that although the free colored citizens also held their own Carnival celebrations, the regulations governing these festivities were rigorous compared to those that governed the festivities of the European elite. All free colored citizens were required to pay licenses to host Carnival activities and to produce evidence of their free status whenever requested to do so, and were not permitted to attend the Carnival celebrations of the white elite (138-140).

Their Carnival celebrations had a very heavy Yoruba influence. These were based on, although not limited to, their traditional work songs and war songs and dances such as the *belair*, as well as rituals such as the Kalenda. The Kalenda involved stick fighting, accompanied by drumming, song and dance, and was characterized by extemporaneous songs noted for their defiant tone and for their tendency to launch verbal assaults on the authorities. It was regarded with suspicion by the authorities because of its potential to incite rebellion, and as result a number of ordinances and regulations were introduced to prohibit Africans from carrying around the sticks used for this activity. Masking was also prohibited, except for Carnival Monday and Tuesday, and even then was only allowed at certain times, as were drumming and dancing (Liverpool 159-160).

By the end of the apprenticeship period in 1838<sup>1</sup>, the Carnival traditions brought by the European settlers had undergone significant transformation as a result of their contact with African traditions. The African celebration of Carnival was known as the ‘Cannes Brûlées’, or ‘Canboulay’. It was “a ceremonial re-enactment of the gangs of slaves mustered late at night to put out cane fires” (Scher, *Carnival* 39). This festive re-enactment generally took place on the night before Carnival Monday and was the start of the final stage of Carnival festivities before Ash Wednesday. The participants paraded

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<sup>1</sup> Although slavery in the Anglophone Caribbean was officially abolished on August 1, 1834, the slaves were not entirely free until 1838. During this period, all slaves over the age of six were required to provide 40.5 hours of unpaid labor to the plantation owner. This period of transition was ostensibly designed so that the former slaves could become accustomed to taking responsibility for their freedom and for their lives (“Abolition of Slavery”).

through the streets with lighted torches, led by the stick fighters and a lead singer known as a *chantuelle* using the typical call-and-response pattern of their musical traditions, accompanied by drummers and dancers. Their Carnival practices were referred to as ‘*Jamette Carnival*’, (‘*Jamette*’ being a derivative of the French word ‘*diamètre*’), so called because they were “the province of those people who lived below the ‘*diamètre*’, the imaginary line that bisected society and divided it into the respectable and the criminal” (Scher, *Carnival* 39). Although the term was initially used to refer to the prostitutes who lived in the working class areas of the capital, its semantic field expanded to refer to anyone associated with those areas or who participated in this kind of Carnival. Like many of the Carnivals of early modern Europe, food, sex and violence were dominant themes of the ‘*Jamette Carnival*’.

Liverpool notes that many of the traditions of the ‘*Jamette Carnival*’ began in the unsanitary and overcrowded slum communities in the towns and cities where the former slaves lived. Despite the appalling conditions, these communities – also referred to as ‘barrack yards’ – proved to be a fertile breeding ground for many of the essential elements of modern-day Carnival celebrations. It was in these yards that the masquerade bands designed and created their costumes and the dancers choreographed their pieces; these ‘yards’ would be the precursor of the modern ‘*mas camp*’ (the home of a masquerade band). It was also the site on which the calypsonians – the storytellers of the community – created and showcased their musical compositions, sparring with each other in song, giving birth to the extemporaneous calypso, and the social and political commentary. The yard was therefore the “theatre of the African population” (Liverpool 253-260). The activities in the yard also functioned as a unifying force for the lower classes; Carnival became “a powerful force for social unity” and “a medium of cultural resistance” (261). Attempts to abolish the ‘*Jamette Carnival*’ were unsuccessful.

A major change in the character of Carnival took place when the colored middle class began to associate itself with the Africans’ Carnival festivities. Scher observes that there had been a steady increase in the number of blacks who rose to middle-class status in the post-emancipation period. Wealth and status, however, were of secondary importance in the rigidly stratified society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Trinidad and Tobago. Under the British, “blackness was the distinguishing feature” (Scher, *Carnival* 36). The middle class, which included the French, Roman Catholics, coloreds and some blacks, felt disenfranchised by repressive British laws instituted against them, even after some of the rights of which they had initially been dispossessed had been restored. In response, the middle class colored population gradually allied itself more firmly with the black former slaves who had moved into their ranks, as well as with those of the lower classes. Whilst many of that class shared the perceptions of Carnival held by the upper classes, they began to see it as a symbol of “race pride” and so championed the cause of Carnival, as well as other elements of the Africans’ culture against threats of proscription by the governing elite. This alliance, however, was not devoid of the “rhetoric of the dominant class” (40); the involvement of the middle classes marked the beginning of the ‘sanitization’ of Carnival.

The changes in Carnival that occurred after the 1890s were motivated by economic and socio-political factors. The merchants, even those who were not colored, fought for the preservation of Carnival because they reaped tremendous benefits; Scher notes that “even the poorest inhabitants of Port-of-Spain liked to spend something on their Carnival costumes, if possible, and saved the whole year for such purposes” (38). Moreover, Carnival had become the “true expression of the nonwhite native-born people

of Trinidad” and “the perfect hook on which to hang a nationalist banner” (41); it was “a diamond in the rough of national culture” (43). For the coloreds, Carnival became a “rallying point” from which they could launch attacks on the white upper classes and the governing elite.

According to Scher, these changes in Carnival involved the adoption of a more Eurocentric aesthetic. The festivities took on a more formal structure; competitions and commercial sponsorship set the parameters for acceptable forms of cultural expression (criteria for judging), laid the foundation for the commodification of the constituent elements of Carnival (calypso, masquerade and steelband) and put the spotlight on the singers and costume designers, rewarding them for meeting the criteria set out in the competition regulations. The competition organizers and the donors of prizes expressed a preference for “continental peasants, Spanish toreadors, milkmaids [and] Danish women” (Scher, *Carnival* 46). This type of Carnival was referred to as ‘pretty *mas*’ in contrast with the “monstrosities” of the ‘*Jamette* Carnival’. In addition, calypsonians were willing to ‘clean up’ their lyrics for a chance at a monetary prize, and recognition of their craft (47).

The venue of Carnival changed; the move from downtown Port-of-Spain to the Queen’s Park Savannah was an attempt to change the ‘social geography’ of Carnival, to raise its status by moving it to more ‘congenial’ surroundings than could be offered by the crowded conditions of the downtown location. With this change of venue, there was increased participation by the wealthier classes; automobiles decorated as floats became a key feature of the new Carnival (Scher, *Carnival* 46). There were numerous Carnival balls, pageants and shows that highlighted the dominance of the European aesthetic on Carnival: costumes were based on European mythology, fairy tales and historical events, and the Carnival queen pageant generally privileged those of European descent. The middle class takeover of Carnival resulted in “the creation of a new public culture that preserved elements of the working-class Carnival dressed in middle-class costume” (50).

Yet another change occurred in the post-World War II and pre-independence era. During this period, there was a “self-conscious replacement of European cultural forms with local or native ones” (Scher, *Carnival* 52). Traditional masquerades that had been eliminated from the festivities earlier in the century – and which were a primary element of the fringe Carnivals of the working class that had continued to exist alongside the ‘pretty *mas*’ of the middle classes – were once again in demand. However, many of the masquerade figures of African-derived tradition, which were initially used in role reversals to make fun of the dominant classes, were no longer in use among the working class, which had not adopted the European patterns in their Carnival either (53). Instead, characters from North American films such as cowboys, Indians and bandits had begun to influence costume design. So-called ‘devil bands’ depicting various images of Dante’s *Inferno* were also extremely popular.

The musical forms also underwent significant changes, as the bamboo and spoon bands of the ‘*Jamette* Carnival’ that had been perceived as unsuitable for inclusion in competition were replaced by steelbands around the 1930s (Liverpool 390). A product of the ‘yard’, the steelbands used oil drums as instruments and attracted young men as they offered entertainment, improved employment prospects and status (465). As was the case with the costume design, steelband music was influenced by US music and films; jazz music, which held great appeal for the *pan* players, encouraged them to expand their range of instruments, to the extent that even classical pieces began to form a significant part of their repertoire by the 1950s.

According to Green and Scher, there was a decline in the performance of traditional masquerade elements such as those depicting masculine aggression and past civilizations, and more local themes were showcased. Moreover, the oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s meant increased wealth for all sectors of the society, resulting in a change in the aesthetics of Carnival. Producers and designers were formally trained in theatrical design and costuming, with the result that there was increased technical sophistication, experimentation and complexity of performance (16). Costumes grew more elaborate, materials grew more costly and more people were financially able to participate in mainstream *mas*. The removal of many social and economic constraints attracted a large number of young middle- and upper-class women to the masquerade.

New genres like *soca* began to dominate Carnival. There was increased interest in ‘*tassa*’ and ‘*chutney*’, hybrid musical forms reflecting a greater participation by the East Indian population in what was primarily an Afro-Trinidadian tradition. Large sound systems playing ‘party music’ began to replace the traditional steelband accompaniment to the street parade. There was a movement away from the traditional forms of *mas*, a movement that Peter Minshall, Trinidad and Tobago’s most prominent *mas* designer, considers a natural consequence of the decreasing relevance of such forms to the social reality of the current generation of *mas* players (Green 70). The Carnival scene in Trinidad, therefore, is divided into two factions: on the one hand, there are the cultural preservationists (the ‘nostalgics’) who would like to see a return to traditional forms of *mas*; on the other, there are those for whom Carnival is defined by “innovation, novelty and the new”, a celebration in which “the acquisition of new forms by force, insertion or borrowing makes for new possibilities” (Green 70-71). For Carnival traditionalists, however, these new forms are nothing more than a hedonistic version of a revered art form, the commodification of which results in the loss of its authenticity and historical identity. Within the context of the ‘new’ Carnival, revelers are no longer involved in the production of costumes, as these are usually mass-produced or imported; musicians and other artists are outwardly focused on the markets of Europe and North America because music, dance and festive styles are “the most exportable product of the Caribbean” (Abrahams 220).

### **Cultural Production as Translation**

Writing with regard to translated literature, Even-Zohar observes how “it participates actively in shaping the center of the polysystem [...] it is by and large an integral part of innovatory forces, and as such likely to be identified with major events in literary history while these are taking place” (“Position of Translated Literature” 200). How does Carnival as translation fit into this framework? It has been demonstrated that Carnival has crossed geographical, social and temporal boundaries. In its various incarnations across the boundaries of these systems, it has been either a stabilizing force in particular socio-historical contexts or, alternatively, an active agent of cultural and social change. It has contributed to the shaping of national and social identity; and more recently has been a significant contributor to the economic system of Trinidad and Tobago. The existence of Carnival is therefore essential to the functioning of the Trinidadian polysystem.

In viewing Carnival as a translated cultural product, analogous to a text that has undergone translation, it is imperative first of all to determine the source and target contexts in which this translation process has taken place. As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, it is difficult to isolate a single source for Carnival as it is celebrated

now, as it has a multiplicity of roots. Within the context of this discussion, Trinidad and Tobago is the target culture.

The concept of *transculturation* elaborated by Fernando Ortiz to describe and explain Cuban culture can be used to explain the development of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. Transculturation was first defined by Ortiz in 1942 as a process that

better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. (102-103)

Thus, in transculturation, the active and creative resistance to assimilation (rejection of acculturation), often over a lengthy period and under very difficult circumstances, leads to the creation of new entities, new identities and “new ways of negotiating power” (neoculturation) (West-Durán 973).

Deculturation eroded the cultural, linguistic and tribal identity of the slaves. Open revolt against their forcible displacement resulted in severe punishment. Forced to use covert methods of revolt against the difficult circumstances under which they lived, they gradually acquired the elements of their new cultural environment that they considered most useful for developing a new cultural identity. One reason for the slaves’ adoption of Carnival upon emancipation was the fact that it served as a form of rebellion against a repressive system. They rebelled physically against the whites whenever they got the opportunity, which resulted in the imposition of laws designed to curtail criminal behavior on their part during festivals. Another reason was that Carnival was an important site of social interaction where Africans from various tribes whose languages were mutually unintelligible found common ground. Liverpool notes that features such as “syncopation, antiphony and improvisation” (18) were common to the Africans’ forms of music and dance, thereby facilitating their ability to interact with each other. The use of drums was soon deemed dangerous because these instruments were an important medium of communication between the slaves. Carnival also provided a way of maintaining a connection with the customs of their homeland.

Toury’s framework for examining translation as a norm-governed activity (58-59) provides some insight into the selection of Carnival as a viable medium of cultural expression by the former slaves, the sources of various practices of the festival and the intermediaries who influenced the changes that took place over time.

A number of groups and organizations have served as intermediaries through which changes in the festival were effected over the course of its existence. The first intermediary comprised the African slaves, who combined elements of the European celebration with their own festival traditions, including their musical instruments, songs and dances. Forced to adjust to their new environment, their ‘*Jamette*’ carnival constituted a rebellion against the social order, fuelled by a need to assert their own identity within the limited contexts in which they were allowed to do so, in what can be described as the neoculturation phase, the phase of creation of new phenomena. Ortiz views this as analogous to the reproduction process in which the “offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them” (103).

The second intermediary was the colored middle class and the merchants who – in the post-emancipation phase until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – worked assiduously to transform Carnival from its ‘*Jamette*’ original. Motivated by a desire to achieve respectability by making the festival more acceptable to the more privileged classes with the incorporation of a more Eurocentric aesthetic, the middle class translated Carnival in such a way as to create a structural form that still exists today even when other elements have changed. In the post-World War II era, Carnival saw a number of changes brought about by the growing number of nationalists – yet another intermediary – for whom the festival represented a powerful symbol of national identity. Folklore and historical events provided the wellspring from which masquerade designers drew their inspiration. In addition, the growing popularity of steelband orchestras fanned the nationalist flame even further.

The East Indian community and the growing number of women participating in the festival constitute another intermediary that has continued to exercise its influence up to the present time; this influence is highly visible in costume design, musical genres and the changing demographic of participants in the various competitions and in the street parades.

Finally, as Carnival became an increasingly important source of revenue for the Trinidad and Tobago economy, the National Carnival Commission, revamped by an Act of Parliament in 1991, was given the mandate to make Carnival a “viable, national and commercial enterprise” (Scher, *Carnival* 19). Carnival became the central attraction in the cultural tourism initiative of the NCC, whose decisions – driven by its mandate – have often been unpopular with the associations of bandleaders, calypsonians and steelbands. However, the NCC is not the only intermediary that has an influence on the evolution of the Carnival product in the present time; Scher observes that “an ideology of Carnival as a national culture is itself shaped by global and transnational forces” and that these ideologies “necessarily shape the Carnival” (*Carnival* 23). For example, a primary goal of one initiative of the TTCSI (Trinidad & Tobago Coalition of Services Industries) – the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival HUB – is to “support the globalization of the Trinidad and Tobago Masquerade industry” (3). The initiative is aimed at providing ICT services to enhance the “competitiveness, market reach and sustainability” of enterprises involved in Carnival, and to enhance their capacity to meet the demands of a festival tailored toward an increasingly global audience.

Many elements of Carnival from both European and African sources were retained throughout the stages of the translation process. These include costuming, masking, dancing, singing, parties, street processions, role reversals and the use of a wide range of instruments. Entertainment, and the creation of social identity and community solidarity have also remained central to the festival.

Changes in the elements that comprise Carnival can be described by expanding the scope of Toury’s operational norms, which govern decisions made during the act of translation. Operational norms determine the selection and formulation of material for the target text, including decisions related to stylistic features (58-59). Several elements of the original festivals were retained in the translation of Carnival. The Africans brought to the festival their musical traditions (songs and instruments), their dances and their masking and costuming techniques and themes. The parade of floats that was a feature of many European Carnivals was not retained by the former African slaves, but was later re-incorporated into the festival by the middle and upper classes. Competitions were also an element of European Carnivals that was not retained in the earlier festivals in Trinidad;

their re-integration into the festival at the beginning of the twentieth century had a significant influence on Carnival, giving it a formal structure and subdividing it into the specialized subsystems (calypso, masquerade and *pan*) that have become canonized systems within Carnival.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the work of Ortiz, Alan West-Durán circumscribes transculturation within the sphere of a metaphor of translation (967-976). Both translation and transculturation indicate degrees of movement across boundaries – of the literal and the figurative, of the familiar and the foreign, of language, of culture, of ethnicity, of nationality, of historical and of geographical space. For Tymoczko, it is the act of integration into a new environment performed by an object that has been translated, or that has been moved from one place or state to another. Both authors view transculturation as the process whereby an object found in a dominant culture is changed through integration with elements of another culture that is perceived as being dominated or having less power. The object becomes a new entity and then re-enters the cultural system of its point of origin where it is readily accepted as an innovation and goes on to exert an influence over existing forms within the culture or system in question (123-125).

This is precisely the trajectory that Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago has followed since the nineteenth century. From this perspective, therefore, Carnival has not only undergone translation; it has also undergone transculturation. This notion is supported by the fact that the kind of Carnival that exists in Trinidad and Tobago has become an annual event on the social calendar in Brooklyn, London and Toronto, where it enjoys recognition beyond the Caribbean diasporic groups in those cities.

I have attempted to show that the traditional forms of calypso, *mas* and *pan* are constantly being challenged by new forms that are influenced by demographic, economic, geographical, political and social factors. According to Nurse, there are several reasons for this phenomenon: 1) the participation of population groups crosses ethnic, gender and generational boundaries – women of all classes and ages (including those of East Indian origin) outnumber the male masqueraders in a ratio of four or five to one and are also highly visible in formerly male dominated areas such as steelband and calypso; 2) the increased revenue potential of Carnival is the backbone of the cultural tourism product, as well as the opportunities for employment outside of the country and beyond the sphere of Carnival – designer Peter Minshall, for example, was involved in costume design and choreography for both the Atlanta and Barcelona Olympics; 3) the Trinidadian brand of the festival has become a template for popular Carnivals in Europe and North America; and 4) politically and socially, Trinidad and Tobago is divided along ethnic lines, and the tone and content of all the major components of the individual Carnival festivals reflect contemporary tensions and social and political realities. “Cultural systems need a regulating balance in order not to collapse or disappear” (Even-Zohar 295). Changes in Carnival, whilst not welcomed by all, provide this regulating balance and a dynamism that is considered necessary for the continued existence of the festival.

It is not possible to make predictions about future changes in Carnival as a translated cultural product in the Trinidad and Tobago polysystem. Even-Zohar (2005) notes that “‘crises’ or ‘catastrophes’ in a polysystem (i.e., occurrences which call for radical change, either by internal or external transfer), if they can be balanced by the system, are signs of a vital, rather than a degenerate, system” (10). It is clear that

Carnival is a vibrant festival that has responded well to change. This has been made evident by the transculturation processes through which it has passed, and is likely to continue to undergo. According to this theory, the existence of Carnival as a translation is assured, although future translations may be governed by different norm systems and may occupy a different position within the polysystem of Trinidad and Tobago.

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