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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART-PRINT

CARIBBEAN FESTIVALS

"BY"

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BA in Fine Art

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More than satins and sequins, wire and cane, papier mache or palettes of colour, Carnival is the ritual of putting on another persona; the art of the mask. Imagine a prince of a sailor whose collar becomes his crown; from the Fire Services' children's band, "Fan-o-rama."

Or an unusual family portrait painted with the creatures of Carnival — a midnight robber, a sailor, a jab jab, a wicked bat woman and a female banshee with medusa locks streaming in the sunlight. Created by Merrylle Mahabir as part of her course requirement at the Jamaica School of Art, the mural on the move, "Colour by Numbers — a painter's mas," was painted on a "canvas" that included her mother Diana, brothers, sisters, sister-in-law and friends.

Carnival Canvas

LIST OF PLATES

A. Map of the Americas showing the location of the Caribbean.

B. Close-up of Caribbean showing the islands.

C. Picture of carnival band showing an influence of vertical strips of colour.

D. Carnival band with the theme of "Reflections of our Childhood".

E. Band based on butterflies called "papillon" created by Peter Minshall.

F. Photo of costumes based on Indian warriors.

G. Band with a fantasy theme.

H. Peter Minshall band based on simple lines of colour.

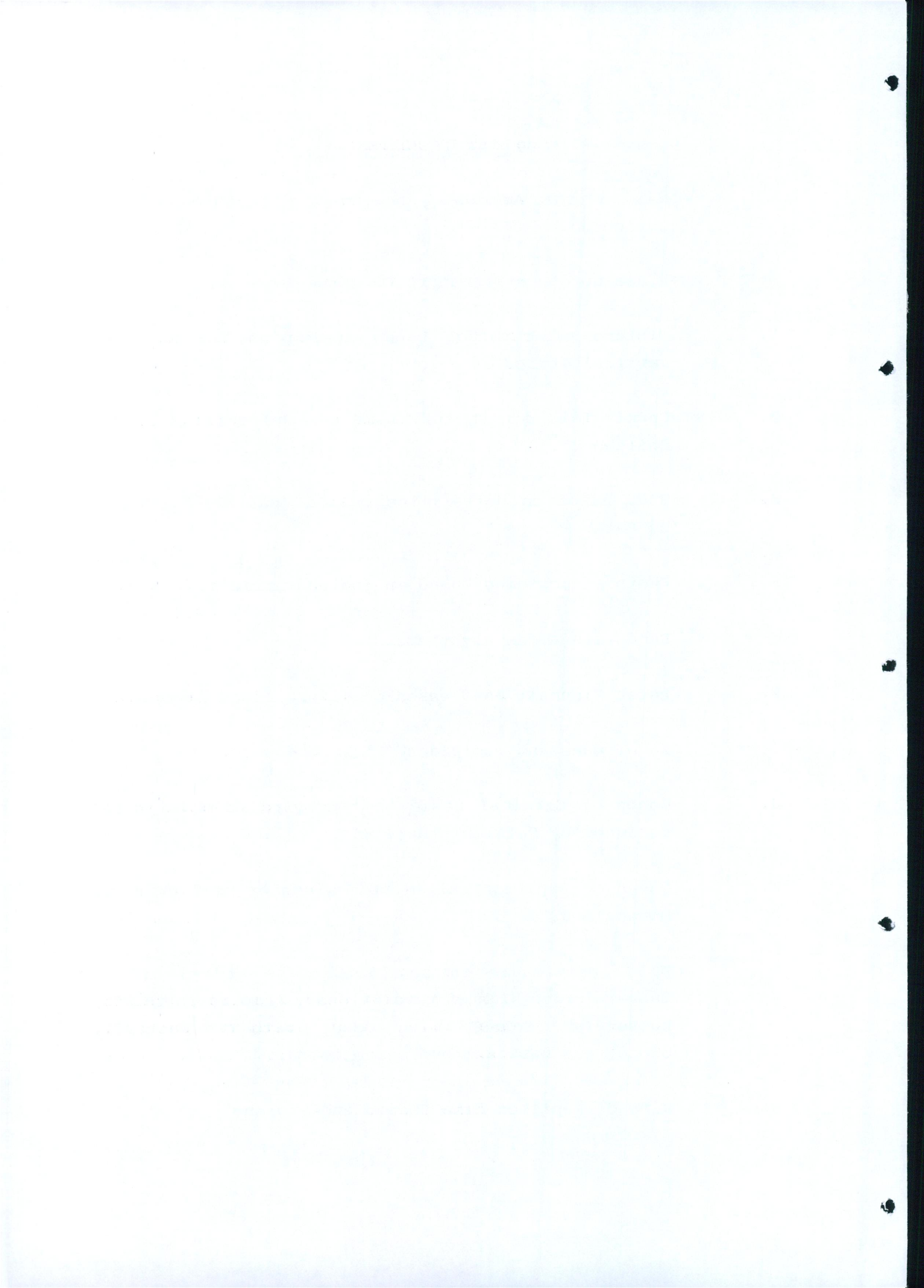
I. Steel pans and musicians.

J. Queen of Carnival based on "Firebird from Paradise" designed by Peter Minshall 84".

K. Queen of Papillon called "the wings of sin" by Peter Minshall 82".

L. Main individuals in papillon. The Legend of Che Guevara rides high in revolutionary colours in the top butterfly. Below, the holocaust with red butterfly blood, gas mask and explosive colour.

M. King of Papillon "The Sacred and Profane".



N. Another strong individual by Peter Minshall 82". "The Adoration of Hiroshima". This costume seeks to remind mankind of the horrors of Nuclear War.

O. "Ole Mas".

P. Childrens carnival costume in top picture represents "music - the food of love, the bottom one based on "sweet things".

Q. Centre-fold picture of a mainly all female section from a typical colourful carnival band.

R. The Moon of Hasan carried by Bato Ali.

S. This 1986 Tadjah from Trinidad exhibits fine craftsmanship and detailed work. Its four corner turrets and central cluster of domes recall Indian ta'ziya.

T. In top photo, the Husain moon touches a tadjah in a symbolic kiss releasing the spirits of the brothers. In bottom photo, two moons in procession.

U. A tadjah being placed in the sea, as an offering to the Supreme Being on the 15th day of Muharram.

V. After the abolition of slavery in 1838, black slaves on the great sugar estates were replaced by indentured labourers mostly from India.

W. The Spanish Town Road Jonkonnu Band, Kingston, Jamaica, August 1984 performing for National Festival. Characters typical of a roots Jonkonnu Band are (left to right) Cowhead, Pitchy Patchy, Horsehead, Devil and a young apprentice in front.

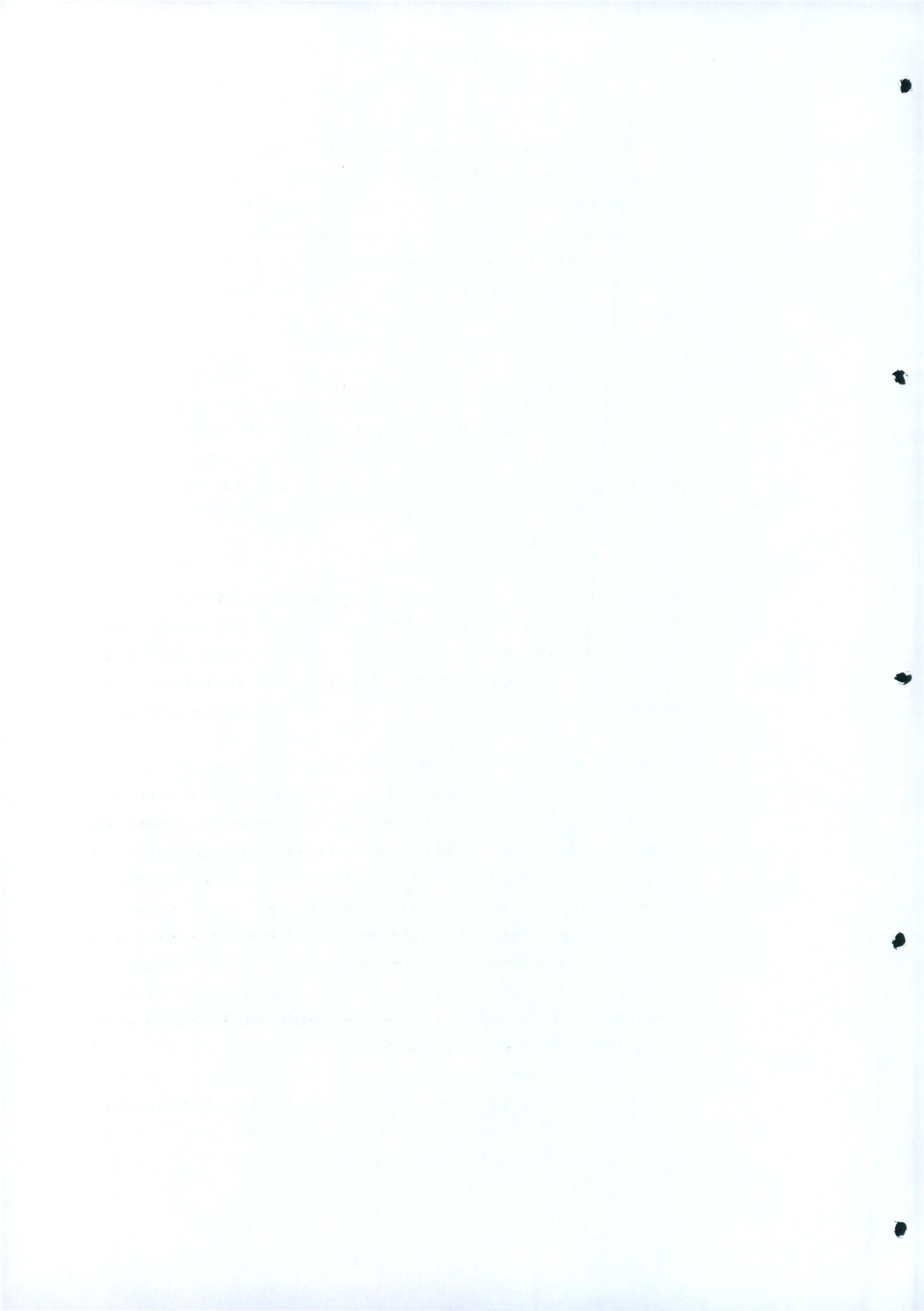
X. Flower girl and King Jamaica 1975. Both these members of a fancy dress Jonkonnu band wear costumes derived from a European country entourage complete with white stockings, knickers and wire screen masks, painted rosy pink. Their headdresses are decorated with Christmas ornaments and the King wears a special decorated straw sombrero.

Y. Valentine Best. Jamaica August 1984, Best plays Wild Indian in the roots Jonkonnu band. His costume usually consists of fringed trousers, overshirt and shirt. Here he wears a feathered headdress adorned with mirrors, a wire screen mask, and his special signature, a heart-shaped chest shield and is playing a rattling drum.

Z. Jonkonnu band. To the left are grouped courtiers. Policeman sits at the right. With its outlined eyes, starkly drawn nose and diamond shaped cheek patterns, his mask deviates from the fancy dress whiteface wire screen style.

A1. Wire screen masks were originally exported to the caribbean and South America in the late 1800's from the tyrol region of Austria. Today the masks are made by local performers. Those more Afro-Caribbean in style are evidence of the transformation workers by a creole aesthetic. Top left - tyrolean carnival mask from the turn of the century. Top right - mask used during the July festival for Santiago Puerto Rico 87". Bottom left - Bermuda Gombey mask used for the Amerindian masquerade 86". Bottom right - Jamaican Jonkonnu mask in a roots style Kingston 87".

B1. Roots Jonkonnu band performing for National festival.



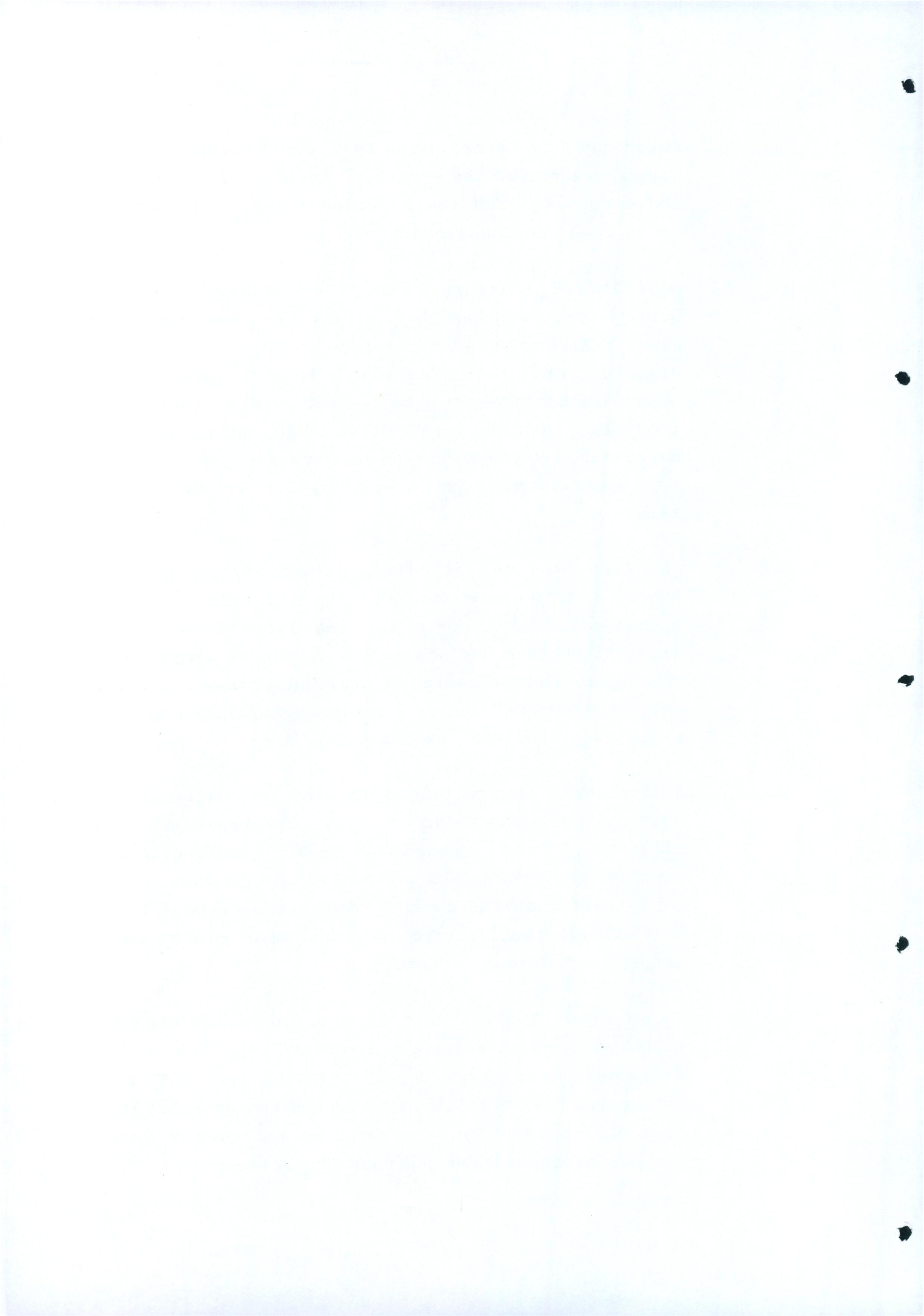
C1. Actor-boy John Canoe, drawn by Isaac Belisario. These actor boys roamed the streets competing for prizes for their costumes and their performances of monologues often based on Shakespeare.

D1. Left figure, Coiffure Ou Le Triomphe De La Liberte. During the eighteenth century European courtly masqueraders often incorporated fanciful and elaborate elements into their costumes. Right figure, Joseph Johnson's headdress may be derived from a senegambian tradition. Johnson wore a model of the ship Nelson and paraded during the Christmas season accepting donations from spectators. From an image by John Thomas, London 1815.

E1. The 1986 band out of Africa from Toronto Caribanna included this outstanding costume inspired by Dan Masqueraders in Liberia and the Ivory Coast. The glistening black surface of the face mask compares to the highly glossed patina of African carvings. A black and white striped cloth - a referral to African country cloth completed the costume.

F1. This masquerading pair from the band African Heritage, Notting Hill Gate Carnival 1985, displayed multiple strands of red coral-like beads, ivory-coloured armlets, and beaded caps surmounted by tusk-like forms, an imitation of the royal costumes of the Obas Kings of the Benin people of Nigeria, who have been monarchs since the thirteenth century.

G1. This unidentified masquerader appeared in 1984 and 1985 Brooklyn Carnival wearing a cardboard rendition of the nimba mask made by the Baga peoples of Guinea Bissau. The artist has faithfully reproduced the parallel rows of beads on the face, representing the rows of brass tack or studs used by the Baga themselves.



Churchill
Bay
Edmonton
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Winnipeg
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Lake Huron
Minneapolis
Ottawa
Halifax
NEWFOUNDLAND
St. John's
NORTH AMERICA
CHICAGO
Lake Michigan
St. Louis
Boston
NEW YORK
PHILADELPHIA
Washington
ATLANTIC OCEAN
UNITED STATES
Denver
APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS
AÇORES AZORES (Port.)
Dallas
Houston
New Orleans
BERMUDA (U.K.)
Gulf of Mexico
Miami
BAHAMAS
MEXICO
La Habana
CUBA
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Guadalajara
HAITI
Port-au-Prince
PUERTO RICO (U.S.)
Santo Domingo
San Juan
JAMAICA
Kingston
BELIZE
GUADELOUPE (Fr.)
CAPE VERDE
HONDURAS
MARTINIQUE (Fr.)
San Salvador
Caribbean Sea
BARBADOS
EL SALVADOR
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Managua
San José
Port of Spain
COSTA RICA
Panamá
GUYANA
PANAMA
VENEZUELA
Georgetown
Paramaribo
Bogotá
FRENCH GUIANA
COLOMBIA
Equator
ARCHIPIÉLAGO DE COLÓN GALAPAGOS ISLANDS (Ec.)
Guayaquil
Manaus
Amazon
Fortaleza
CABO DE SÃO ROQUE
Natal
Recife
Trujillo
B R A Z I L
Lima
SOUTH AMERICA
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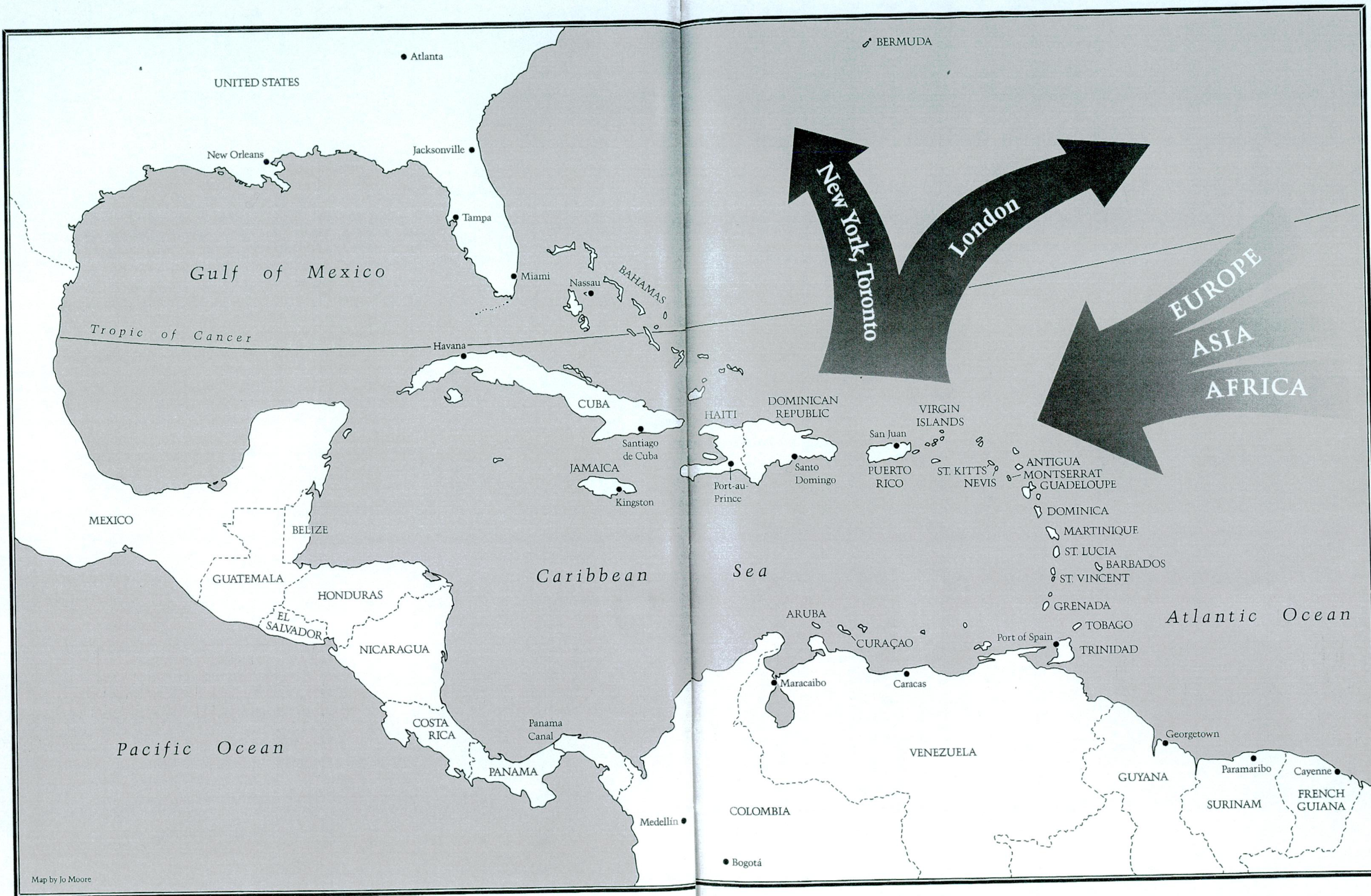
Santos
Asunción
Curitiba
ISLA SAN AMBROSIO (Chile)
CHILE
Pôrto Alegre
Córdoba
Valparaíso
Santiago
URUGUAY
ISLAS JUAN FERNÁNDEZ (Chile)
BUENOS AIRES
Montevideo
ARGENTINA
Concepción
Mar del Plata

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean's ethic complexion, as well as its dynamic economic and political history are the ingredients of its festival arts. Religion, costumes, musical traditions and the friction created by slavery and perpetuated by racial inequities all contribute to the dates on which festival celebrations occur, their themes, social and satirical commentary, and the forms, colour and music they celebrate. At the heart of festivals in the Caribbean are three major celebrations, Carnival, Hosay and Jonkonnu, which typify a public attitude toward celebration and which, except for the Hosay Festival in Trinidad, do not incorporate systematic religious rituals. Carnival, Hosay and Jonkonnu draw on old world traditions, derived from the combining of European pre-Lenten festivals with traditional African masquerades. Carnival is celebrated in Trinidad during the week before Ash Wednesday and during Summer months in London, Toronto, New York and Metropolises of the west. Jonkonnu grew out of African dance and masquerades combined with English folk festivals such as mumming, and is usually celebrated around the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Hosay, occurring in the Muslim month of Muharram, commemorates the martyred grandsons of Mohammed, named Husain and Hasan, with the building of large tomb-like structures. In the West Indies it is celebrated by East Indians of diverse faiths. Festival costumes and music take on the sweetness and spice of many cultures, forming a pan-Caribbean aesthetic.



Atlanta
UNITED STATES
BERMUDA
New Orleans
Jacksonville
Tampa
Miami
Nassau
BAHAMAS
Gulf of Mexico
Tropic of Cancer
Havana
CUBA
Santiago de Cuba
JAMAICA
Kingston
HAITI
Port-au-Prince
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Santo Domingo
San Juan
PUERTO RICO
VIRGIN ISLANDS
ST. KITTS
NEVIS
ANTIGUA
MONTSERRAT
GUADELOUPE
DOMINICA
MARTINIQUE
ST. LUCIA
BARBADOS
ST. VINCENT
GRENADA
TOBAGO
TRINIDAD
Port of Spain
New York, Toronto
London
EUROPE
ASIA
AFRICA
MEXICO
BELIZE
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
COSTA RICA
PANAMA
Panama Canal
Caribbean Sea
Atlantic Ocean
Pacific Ocean
ARUBA
CURAÇAO
Maracaibo
Caracas
VENEZUELA
Georgetown
GUYANA
Paramaribo
SURINAM
Cayenne
FRENCH GUIANA
COLOMBIA
Medellín
Bogotá
Map by Jo Moore

CHAPTER 1

CARIBBEAN FESTIVALS

CONTEXT

Presently West Indians are of African, East Indian, Carib, Anglo, Spanish, French, Chinese and Middle Eastern Origin. They practice Vodoun, Rastafarianism Obeah and Shango as well as Catholicism, Islam, Hindu and varieties of protestantism.

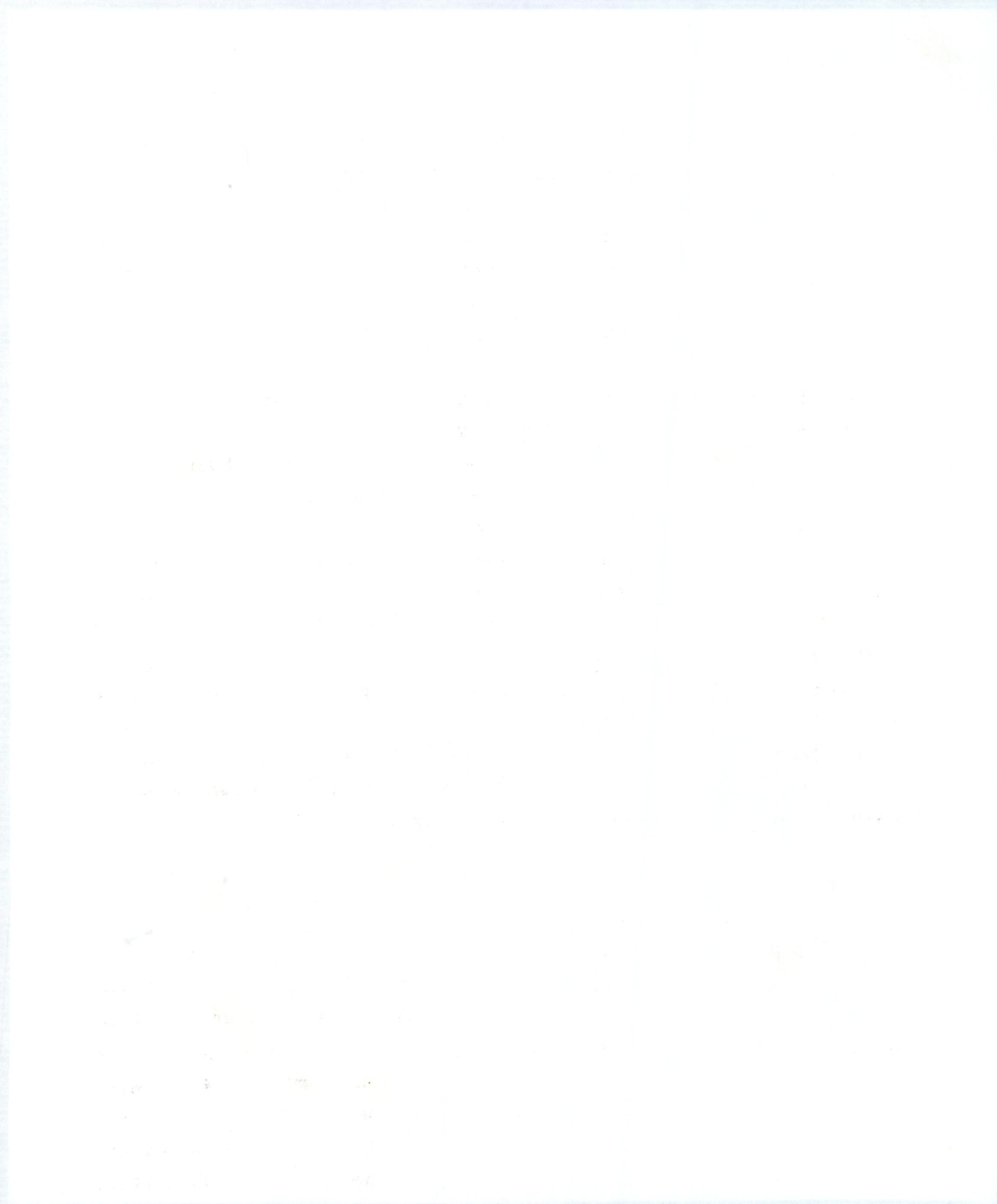
The West Indian islands encompass the land masses along the eastern boarder of the Caribbean Sea, extending from Florida to north of Venezuela's Orinoco river on the South American continent. The Caribbean Basin includes the island of Cuba, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Montserrat, St Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Guateloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent, Barbados, Grenada, Tobago, Trinidad and the culturally related countries of Bermuda, Belize and Guyanna.

The time frame for Caribbean festivals starts from about 1833 when emancipation happened releasing the slaves, to 1917 when indentured workers were brought to the islands to replace the slaves, a large proportion came from India. The festivals have continued to the present day.

There are three main festivals in the Caribbean. Carnival, the Hosay Festival and Jonkonnu.

The Trinidad Carnival runs annually on the two days preceding Ash Wednesday at the start of the Lenten season. The origins of the festivals go back to a pagan custom, a custom that was modified by the Church of Rome to become a two-day festival during which converts were permitted to pay "farewell" to the devil, pomp,

HALLOWEEN
HALLOWEE



vanity and the lust of the flesh before entering upon the forty days of fasting and repentance known as Lent.

The Trinidad Carnival today is an altogether wild, extravagant affair, incorporating huge multicolour fantasy costumes with rich blends of ideas, materials and styles, coming together with loud steel pan music and crowds of people jumping up in the streets.

Carnival's basic structural unit is the masque band made up of any number of masquerades, from two to eight hundred. The word "masque" indicates that the band wears costumes based on a theme from history, current events, films, Carnival tradition, from the imagination or from a combination of these. It is thus differentiated from "mask" the covering of the face and, on head sometimes worn by the masquers. In local pronunciation both are "mas" but are clearly differentiated concepts in the minds of the masquers. The kinds of masques played in the last hundred years of Carnival are extremely varied, suggesting that Carnival is a major focus of culture for the urban Trinidadian. He/she spends more time and thought, has a more extensive vocabulary, and is more praised for innovation in the creation of Carnival masques than in any other aspect of his culture.

THE SHAPE OF CARNIVAL TODAY

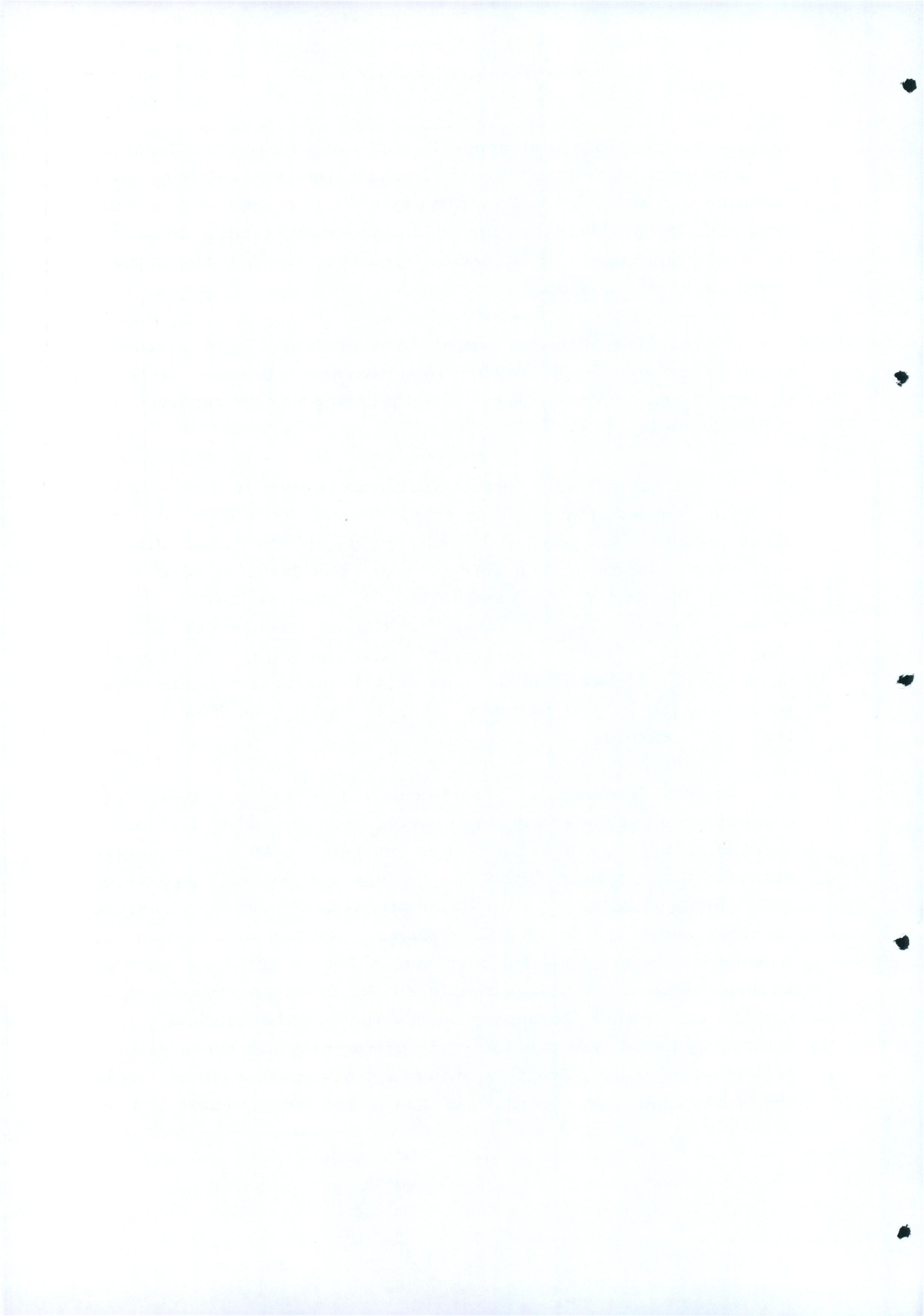
In September, the biennial steel band classical music competitions are attended by Trinidadians from all over the island. Here the audience discusses the previous years steel bands and the "mas bands". Later in the Fall, the designers and band leaders hold mas launchings where drawings of each band section, Kings and Queens and band themes are presented. Artists visit each other's camps and eventually word gets out about who is doing what. The question one inevitably asks a friend up until Carnival is "What band will you play?" Fetes or parties are held each weekend after Christmas in anticipation of Carnival. The steel bands perform several nights a week. The Calypsonians

release new recordings or songs in hopes of winning the Carnival Calypso March Award. Through January the entire city is a seething workshop. Formal events begin about a week before Mardi Gras with the preliminary King and Queen competitions. These are the Kings and Queens of Carnival. The best usually the biggest costumes in any one band.

The next evening "Ole Mas competitors wearing simple costumes, often dirty and rough looking in appearance, present skits of political and social satire. The following day is reserved for Calypso competitions.

Calypso started out as a form of folklorical song in the eighteen hundreds, and was performed by ex-slaves who could make comments about events and people in authority at the time without suffering censorship. On Friday before the Carnival Monday and Tuesday, the semi-finals of the King and Queen of Carnival takes place. Then on Saturday there is the children's Carnival, a smaller version of the adults in which there is also King and Queen competitions. And as much detail and attention is given to the making of the costumes here, to match even that seen in the adults Carnival.

On Saturday evening at Pan-O-Rama, the grand steel band competitions get under way. The performance continues till early morning and the steel bands are judged Sunday night called Dimanche Gras, presents the final Kings and Queens competition and the Calypsonians. By this time people have arrived at strong opinions about the music and costumes. By two in the morning, some have returned home for a shower, a little drink and perhaps an hours rest while others remain at the fetes (partys) waiting for the steel bands to appear on the roads. Then around 4 am a few Jouvay bands from distant parts of the city are heard faintly from the French Jour Overt (opening day) gives strength to people who must find their bands and begin the trip, (walking) to



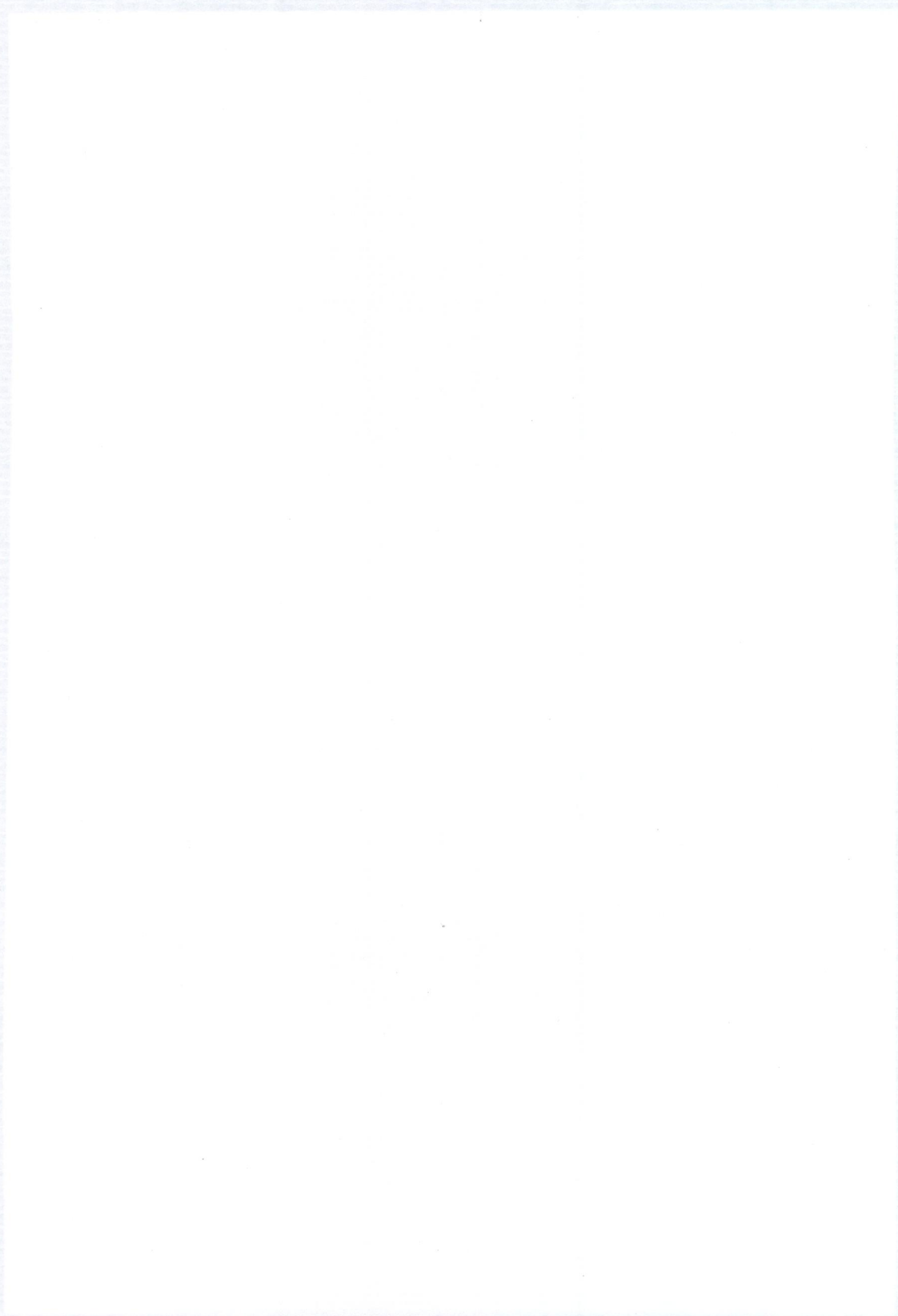
Las' lap
MAURIER
du MAURIER

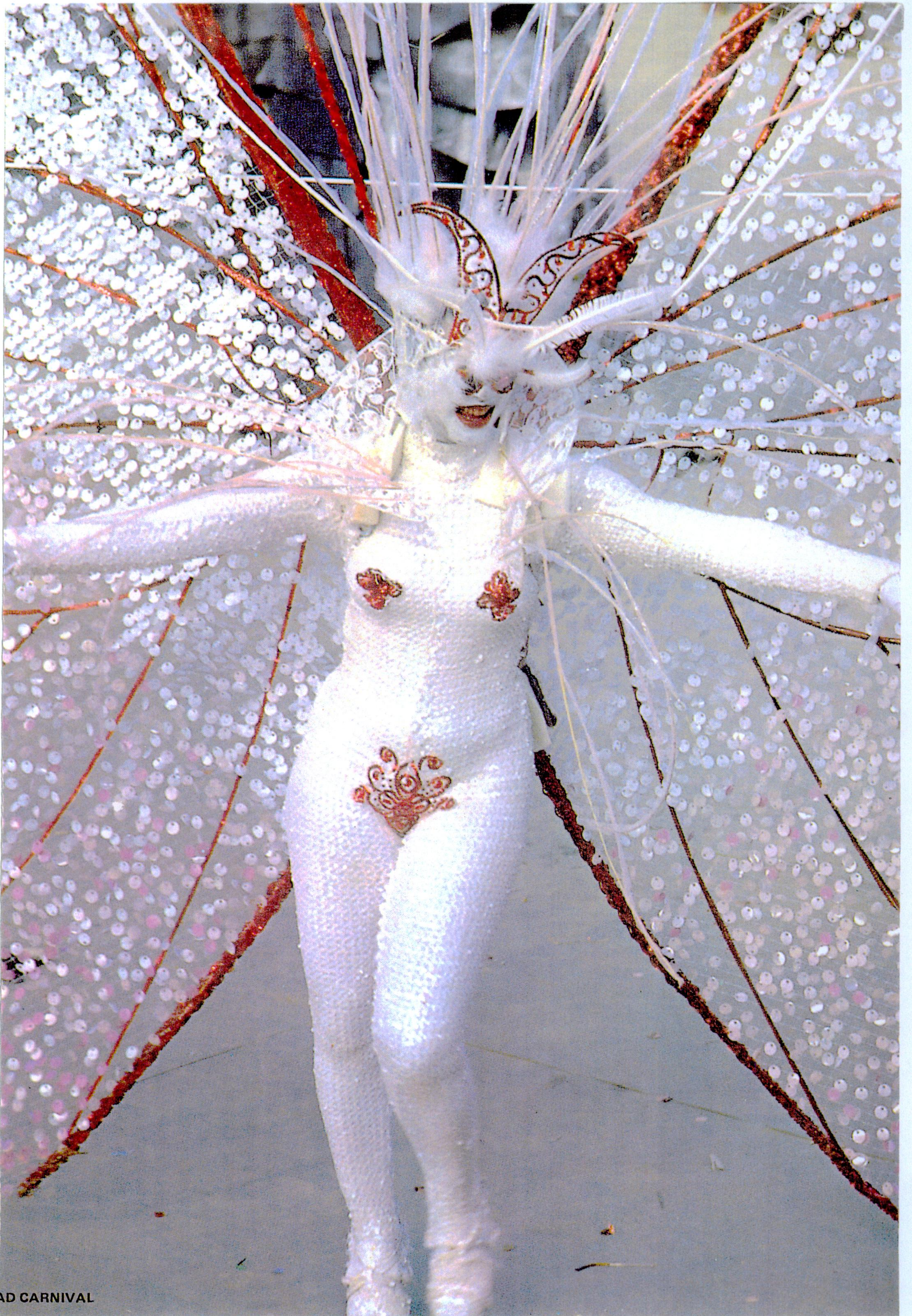
Independence Square in the centre of town, Port-of Spain, capital of Trinidad.

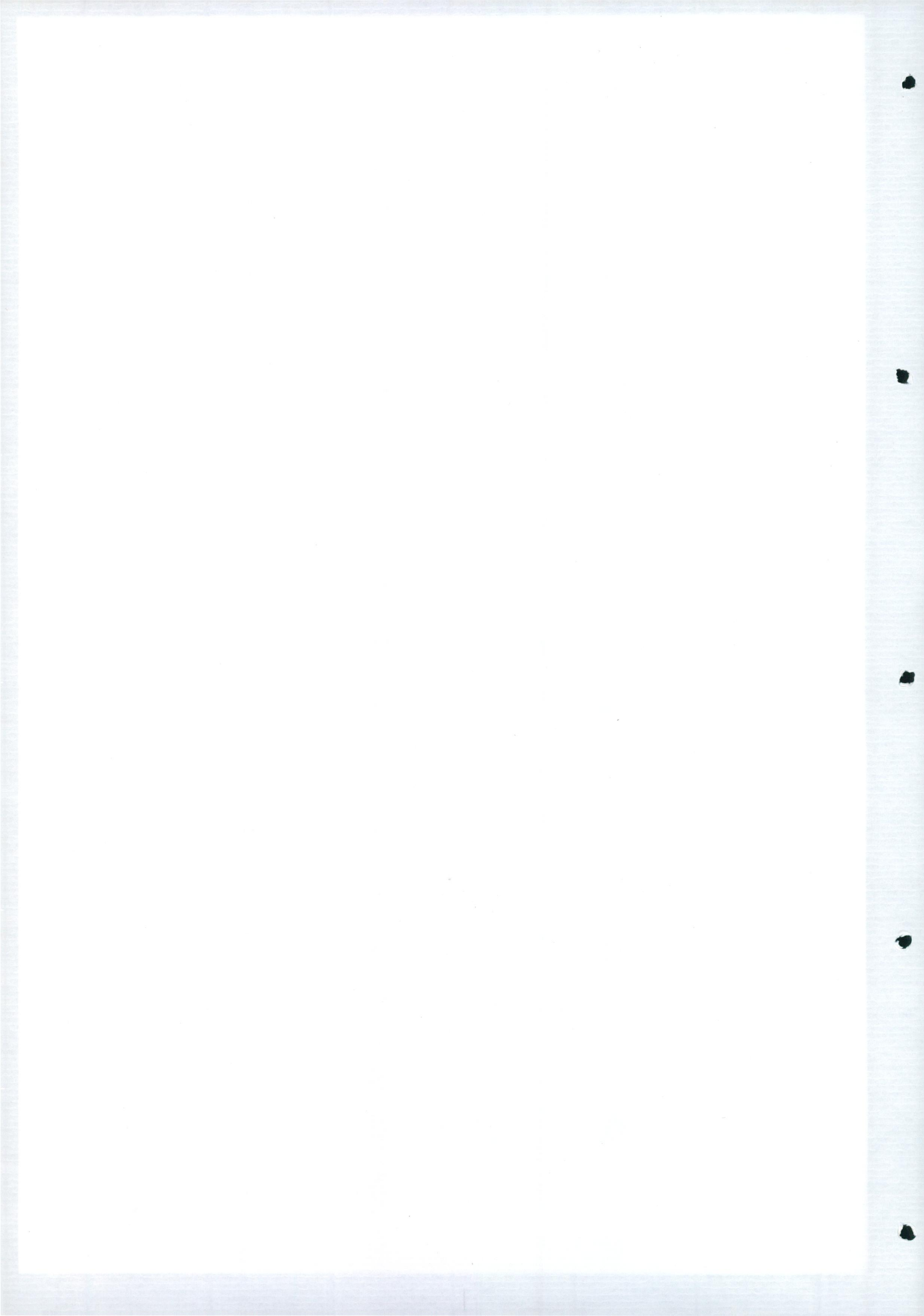
Participants often cover themselves with mud or ash, soot and oil. While others are dressed in worn, old clothes or dilapidated costumes, similar to "ole mas". Soca musicians, steel bands and other less organised groups play with a fiery syncopation that breathes movement into the fatigued revellers (W Nunley 1988 p 86). As bands move closer and closer to Independence Square the music and dance recall the days when black slaves lit the night with their torches. Palm branches are blessed with libations of beer, rum or the mud and soot worn by participants.

The liberation of Jouvay carries participant into Carnival, in which ordinary life is waived. The mixture of soot and oil that coats the players symbolises that passage. After Jouvay, most people eat a hearty brunch with tradition foods like black pudding and salt fish. Band members return home to dress for "mas" though still not in their best or complete costumes. The Carnival Monday is a day for browsing and spontaneity but on the Tuesday they must each wear the full costume, as the judging of the bands takes place on this day. The groups dance up Frederick Street and parade across the stage called the Grand Stand. It is a hugh stage with hundreds of seats on either side allowing those who did not take part in the Carnival to watch from their seats. The stage is situated in the savannah, a large grass area in Port-of-Spain. This was once the site of a sugar plantation. What was a symbol of slavery and bondage is now one of liberation.

On Monday night people attend parties before retiring for the Grand Finale on Tuesday. By late morning band members assemble at designated points along the road. Paw bands, soca orchestras and disc jockeys with electronic components and giant speakers on wheeled carts of flatbed trucks mingle among the bands. The




AD CARNIVAL



mellow, pulsating motion of the dancers is expressed by such soca lyrics as "Ah Feeling Nice Now" and "Hot Hot Hot". After masquerading in the streets for hours the last participants cross the stage in late evening. Carnival ends at Midnight.

THE HOSAY FESTIVAL

On September 15th the celebration of Hosay in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad is ending. Muslim participants, exhausted by the weight of the ritual objects they carry about for four days, stare light-headedly into the distance. The people had quietened down as prayers were offered in front of the moons. The air is slightly cooled now that the sun has moved past its highest point. One elder dressed in a suit with a gold and blue tie, proudly explains how his people, the East Indians and their descendants in Trinidad had triumphed after many hardships.

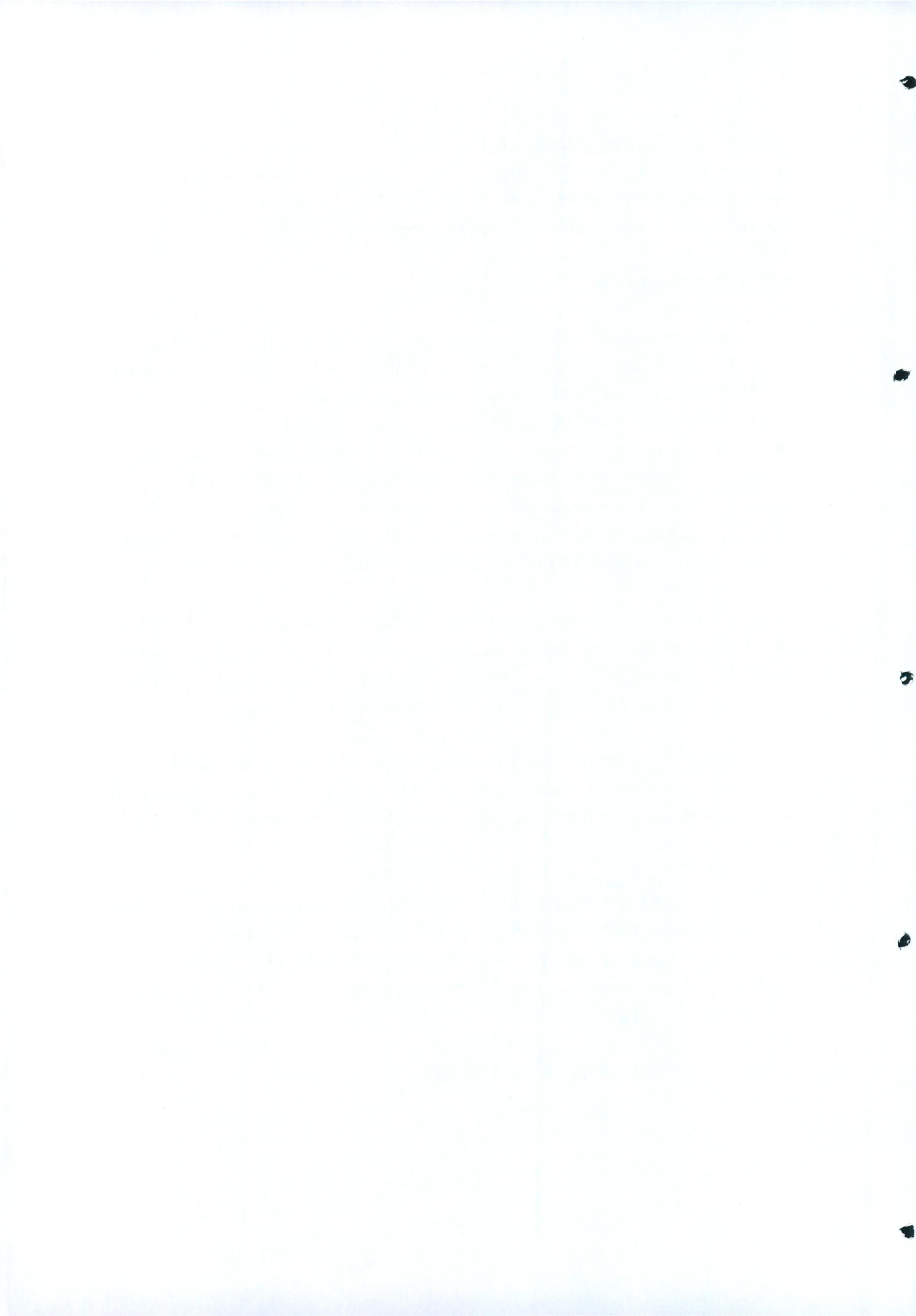
When Queen Victoria gave permission to Trinidadian East Indians in 1863 to carry their sacred moon objects onto the Queen's Royal College Grounds, she granted the festival of the country's newest migrants recognition and status that endure to this day.

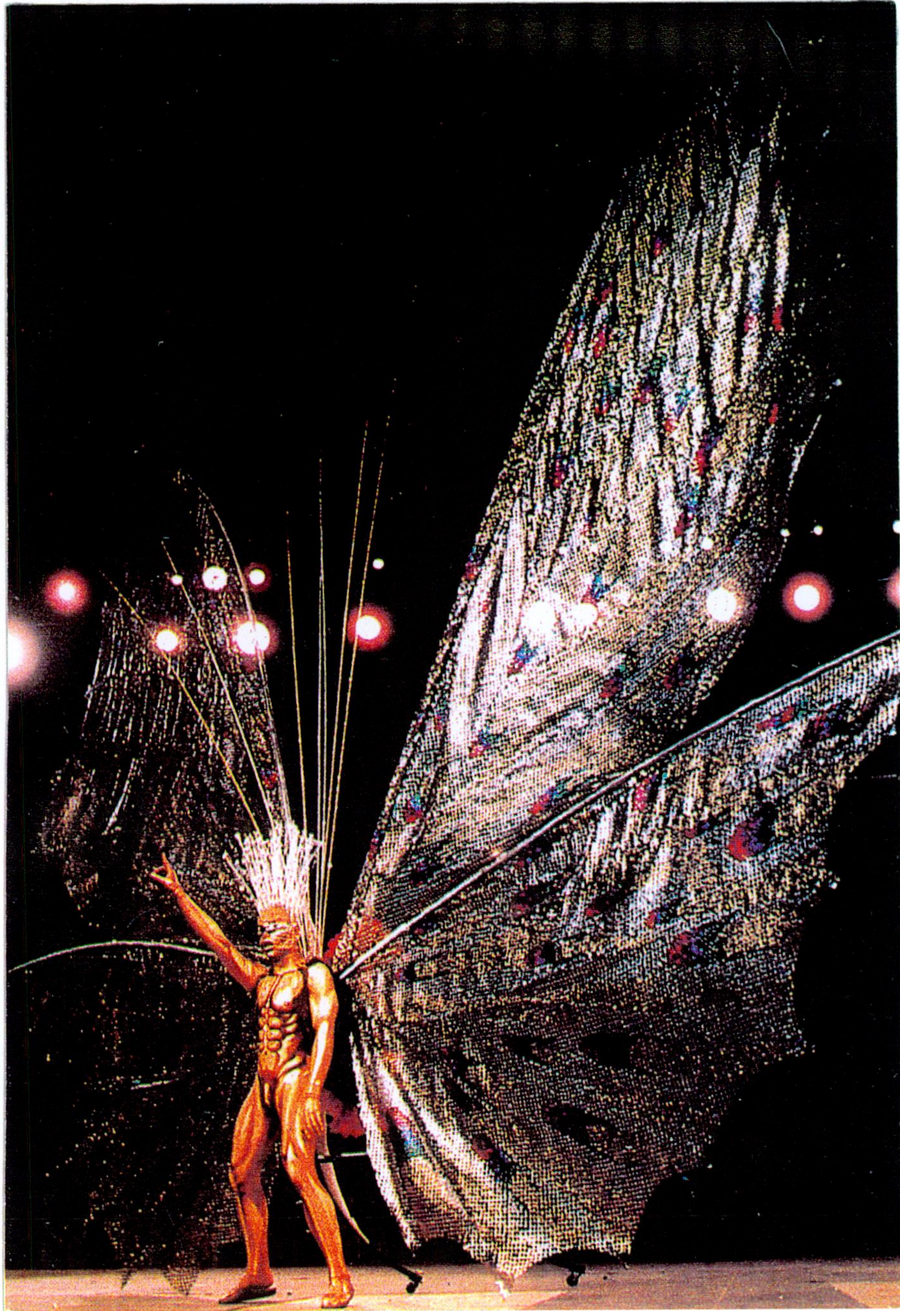
The Hosay Festival is part of the Broader celebration of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim year. Imam Husain was the second son of Ali and Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammed.

NOTE:

"One individual of the first twelve generations of direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed is an Imam".

His elder brother Hasan was forced to abdicate as the fifth Caliph and at Hasan's death (by poison). Husain attempted to reinstate his family's rule. He led his supporters in a revolt against the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus. Husain and his supporters were trapped in the Desert at Karbala on their way to Syria.





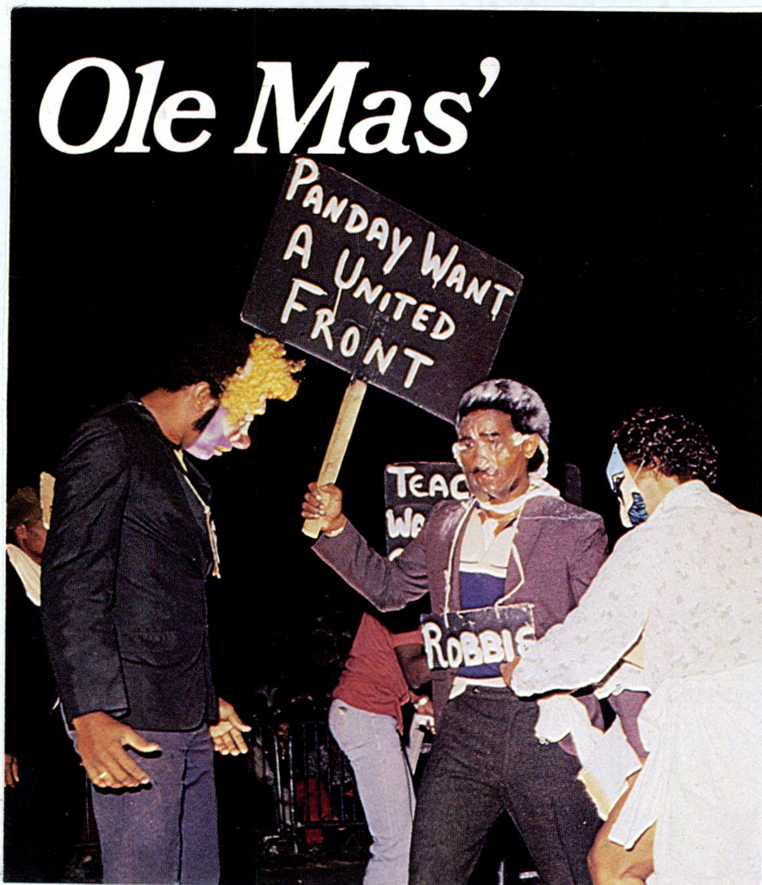
On the 9th of Muharram the commander of the opposition received notice to declare war, and on the 10th war began. Just before the catastrophe Husain's daughter Fatima married Hasan's son Kasim, but Kasim was immediately killed in the fighting. Many of the supporters were killed, even the two infant sons of Husain and Hasan. Adding to the tragedy, many died of thirst in the desert. Ultimately Husain was killed. His one surviving son carried his severed head as he and the few remaining supporters were led to the Caliph Yazid 1. Incidents from Husains life and the tragedy at Karbala have become part of the dramatic cycle of the Hosay festival.

The festival commemorating this event takes place during the first ten days of Muharram. The martyrdom of Husain is observed differently around the world. In Iran, the celebration centres around the ritual theatre or ta'ziya dramas, in which both spectators and performers re-enact the massacre at Karbala and other incidents in Husain's life. Of special significance is the influence of the practice in India on those in the Caribbean for in many Caribbean and Caribbean-rim nations, East Indians account for much of the population.

Both Carnival and Hosein are processions, and the animation of a march has a more exciting effect on a crowd than a function that takes place in one spot. And perhaps most important of all, each have a strong competitive element in it. In Carnival it was and still is, the rival bands that compete in the ingenuity of their themes and in the magnificence of their costumes. In Hosein it is the rival ta'ziyas that compete for admiration and to be first in the procession or first at the edge of the water. The rival of Hosay is between estates and it is the working group and not religion or the same home district which determines the allegiance of those who take part.

The parallels between the Caribbean festivals and those in mother India are clear to this day. In India one can distinguish

HOUSEWIVES
FEELING
CHICKEN SCARCE
ONLY OLD FOWL
AVAILABLE
MANOEVERING

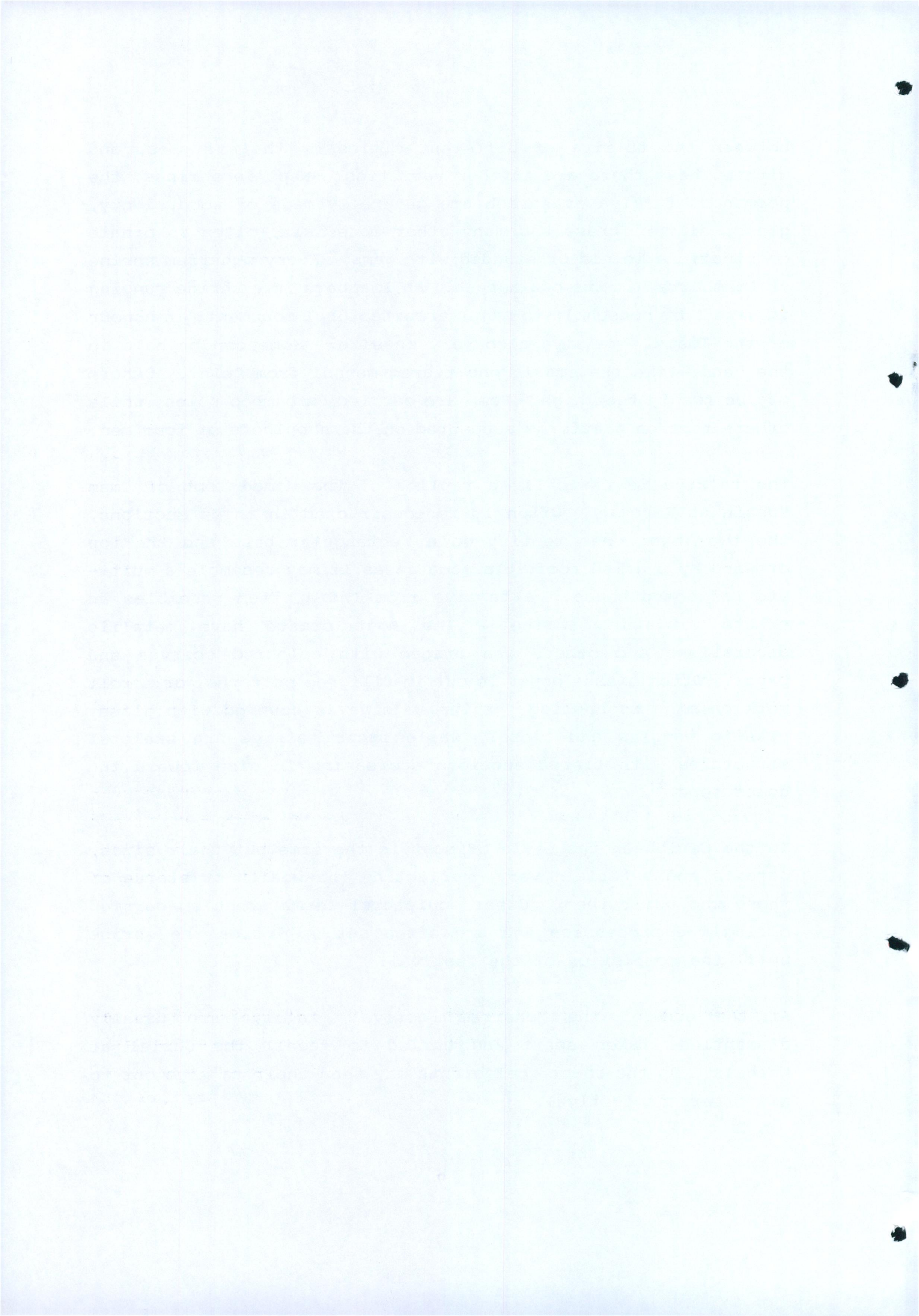

Ole Mas'
PANDAY WANT
A UNITED
FRONT

between the ta'ziya of different cities by their styles, and within these there are further varieties. Kept in shrines, the permanent ta'ziya or zareeh are generally made of wood, ivory, glass, silver, brass and many other materials, often in ornate combinations inlaid or studded with gems. Every muharram shrine or Imambarra has its own zareeh. An Imambara is a shrine ranging in size from household to major architectural monument, in honour of the Imams. Ta'ziya also vary in size. Some can be held in the hand, like the small, one-tiered menhdi from Delhi. Others may be twenty feet high. Some are carried on bamboo poles, while others rest on platforms supported on the shoulders of four men.

The ta'ziya is basically a replica of the domed tomb of Imam Husain at Karbala. Often it is constructed in three sections, the two lower ones resting on a rectangular base and the top crowned by a domed roof. In some cases it may resemble a multi-storied domed house. A ta'ziya from India often resembles an ornate miniature shrine. The most ornate have metallic decorations and others are draped with coloured scarves and paper. Often tissue paper is cut in filigree patterns, or scroll work on mica is applied, or the ta'ziya is covered with glass, plastic bangles and tinsel, while other ta'ziya are skeletal structures with tiered sections decreasing in size toward the domed tops.

In the Caribbean the style of most is the same but their sizes, details and materials vary, reflecting the wealth or status of those who built them. Other sculptural forms are also carried during the procession and are often set up inside the shrine until the completion of the festival.

At the end of the Muharram Festival, ta'ziya are usually dismantled, taken apart and buried to recall the burial at Karbala. On the coast, celebrants may send their ta'ziya out to sea after the festival.



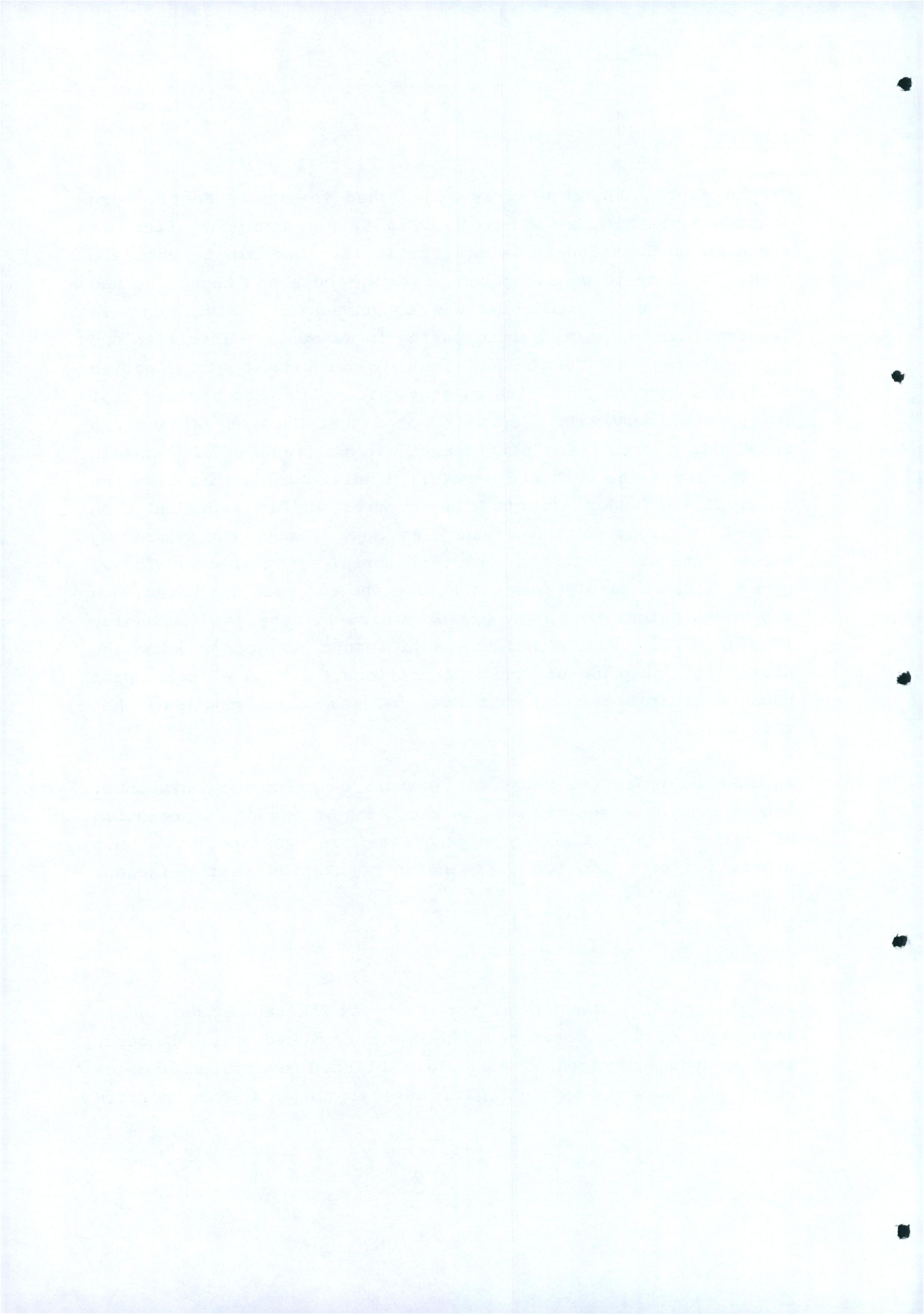
JAMAICA

Martha Warren Beckwith first researched the Hosay Festival in Jamaica publishing her findings in 1924, just one year after her research on Jamaican Christmas Festivals. One man to whom she spoke had come to Jamaica from Luckwow, India and though he had been a Muslim in India, he was converted to Christianity in Jamaica. As in India, participating in Muharram festivities and paying homage to Husain had less to do with one's specific religious descent than with an ethnic identity that became vital to cultural survival. Beckwith noted that Muslims, Hindus and East Indian Christians participated in the festival for Husain and the songs she recorded were all Hindi. During this time the festival was under strict local control and in fact had been banned in Kingston and Savanna La Mar because the competing processions often clashed over territorial right of way. Today, since there is rarely a devout Muslim who can read the Koran, men and women gather to sing songs of praise for the dead (W Nunley 1988 p 127). Many Jamaican participants no longer know the historical origins of the celebrations, but they take part because it is something that East Indians do or something that they enjoy.

In Jamaica today the Hosay festival is enjoying a renaissance. One important reason may well be the Seaga Government's promotion of cultural pluralism, giving greater recognition to ethnic minorities of which the East Indian population is the largest nation.

JONKONNU

Jonkonnu is a Jamaican street festival characterised by an entourage of wire screen masked and costumed male dancers, performing mimed variations on an established repertoire of dance steps and accompanied by small musical corps. They perform



sometimes at Christmas, but more often on important state occasions.

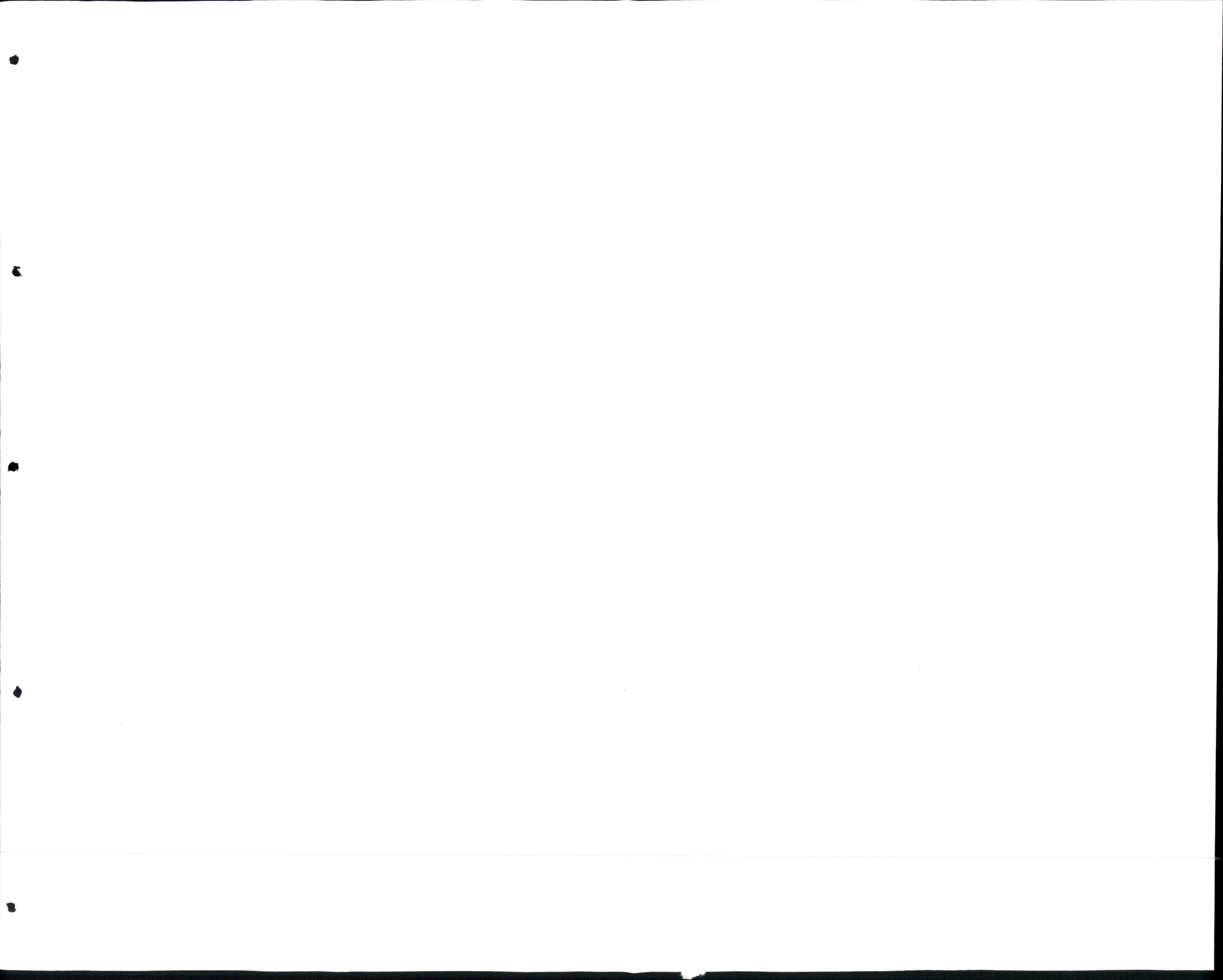
Since at least the beginning of the Eighteenth Century in Jamaica, masked and costumed performers have paraded the streets during the Christmas season and have given performances, originally before Great Houses, and subsequently before the residences or offices of people important in the community.

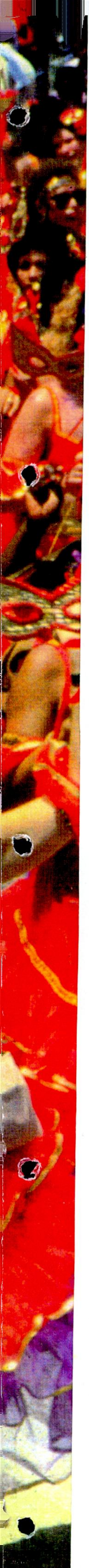
Variations on this festival occur in many British influenced Caribbean nations including Belize, St Kitts-Nevis, Guyana and Bermuda in the South Atlantic. In no two places are the festivals exactly the same. In Belize, the custom seems to have a direct Jamaican connection, while contemporary Bahamian Junkanoo shares only a name with the Jamaican practice.

In Jamaica today, Jonkonnu consists of all male entourages who are either Roots Jonkonnu maskers or members of fancy dress bands. The Roots masquerades include such characters as Cowhead, Horsehead, Pitchy Patchy, Devil Warrior and Amerindian. These bands tend to be located in the eastern region of Jamaica and are strongly Neo-African in style. The word Roots is in keeping with the Jamaican vernacular connoting "peasant" to some and "lower class" to others, but always emphasising a strong black presence; reggae music and Rastafari religion are both considered Roots Jamaican. The performances of both types of bands are structurally the same (Roots and Fancy Dress). They use the same basic steps and follow the same performance pattern of a procession followed by a break out, but the quality of motion, the identity of the characters and the costumes differ.

Fancy dress bands mainly come from the Western Jamaican parishes of St Elizabeth, Westmoreland and Hanover. The costumes of fancy dress bands show strong European influence, incorporating the courtly attire of such characteristics as kings, queens and courtiers, but in wildly coloured prints, embellished with

plastic flowers and Christmas ornaments that are evidence of the transformation worked by a creole aesthetic. Other characteristics include the sweeper, jockey and sailor. Today most Jonkonnu bands perform on a stage.





CHAPTER 2

HISTORY

The people who brought the Carnival to Trinidad began arriving around 1785, and they came here as a result of what is known as the "Cedula of Population" for Trinidad. This was a decree proclaimed by Carlos IV of Spain in 1783.

The background to this measure was linked to the situation of conflict existing in the West Indies at the time. Ever since Columbus had encountered and claimed the "New World" for Spain 1492-1504 the other maritime nations of the "Old World" had been envious of Spain and eager to gain land in these parts. The British and the French were the most prominent of these nations. In the early 17th Century they began establishing themselves first as friends, and then as bitter foes and rivals.

It was this rivalry that led to the "Cedula of Population" and the key island to cite here is Grenada. Grenada, which had been settled by the French in 1650 was captured by the British in 1762 during a bitter struggle against the French in the Wind Ward islands. The French settlers in Grenada remained very uneasy under British rule, and one of them, a planter named Roume De St Laurent came to Trinidad in 1777. The Spanish in Trinidad welcomed Laurent and other French people. Spain opened its doors to the French hoping to secure Trinidad against a British invasion. This formal invitation is what became known as "Cedula of Population". The Cedula for Trinidad was put into effect by the Spanish in 1783. The only stipulation for the Cedula was that any immigrants to Trinidad must be catholic.

During the next 14 years, the main immigrants to Trinidad were French colonists and their slaves from other islands. The French settlers who came to Trinidad shared two things in common. They feared the British and wanted to escape their rules, and they

celebrated Carnival. The French whites, who in the main, owned the estates and plantations, celebrated the Roman Catholic feast of Carnival in their great houses. It was a joyous occasion for Carnival, which literally means "farewell to flesh". It was the period when one threw off all inhibitions before embarking on the season of fasting which was Lent. The wealthy French planters held maskers balls in their homes and the finery and splendour that marked such occasions holds great fascination for the slaves. (Carr 1956 p15).

It is certain that around Carnival time the slaves held their own little Carnivals in their backyards. And at such times their imitation of the characters in the French balls would be predominant. But also playing an important part would be aspects of their own African past, especially the rituals and the folklore. And there were certain features about the French balls which would have appealed strongly to them. For instance the masking. Masking rooted in the catholic festival of Carnival as a symbol of deception, no doubt because of Judas Iscariot's deception of Christ. This had special meaning for the slaves because masking was also a big part of many African peoples, especially in their rituals for the dead. Emancipation which came in 1833, added another layer of meaning to the festival, when the ex-slaves joined the Carnival with an exuberance and a rage that completely eclipsed the prissy masquerading of the French creoles who withdrew from the festival.

The ex-slaves came out onto the streets in great numbers to celebrate the masquerade. They hid behind their masks which made them feel safe and carried on wildly in the streets, making fun and taking out a feeling of revenge against their former owners.

As a result of late seventeenth century British trade policy which destroyed parts of the Indian economy, India descended into depression with mass unemployment. This development was to offer the British a ready supply of contract or indentured labour which

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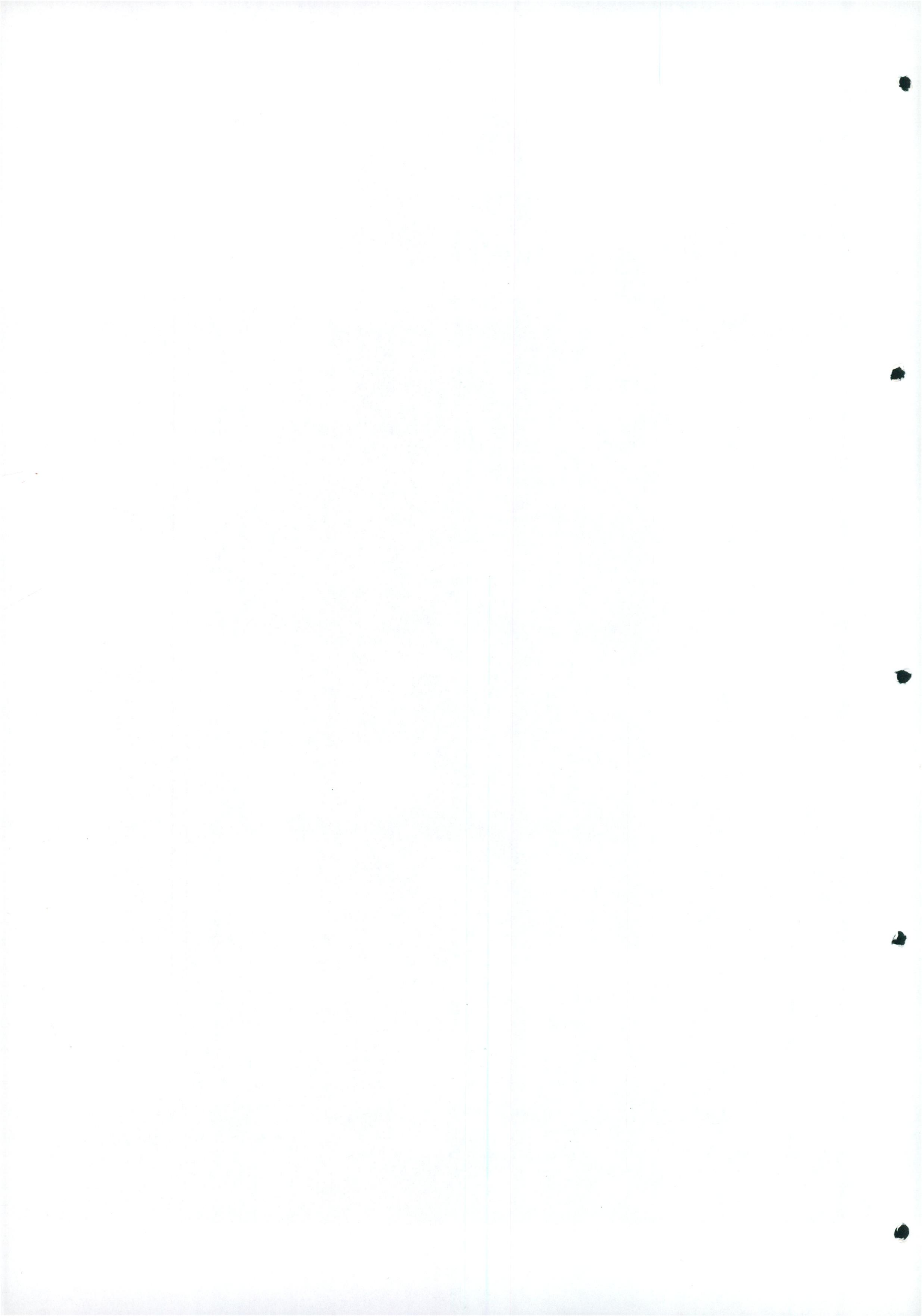

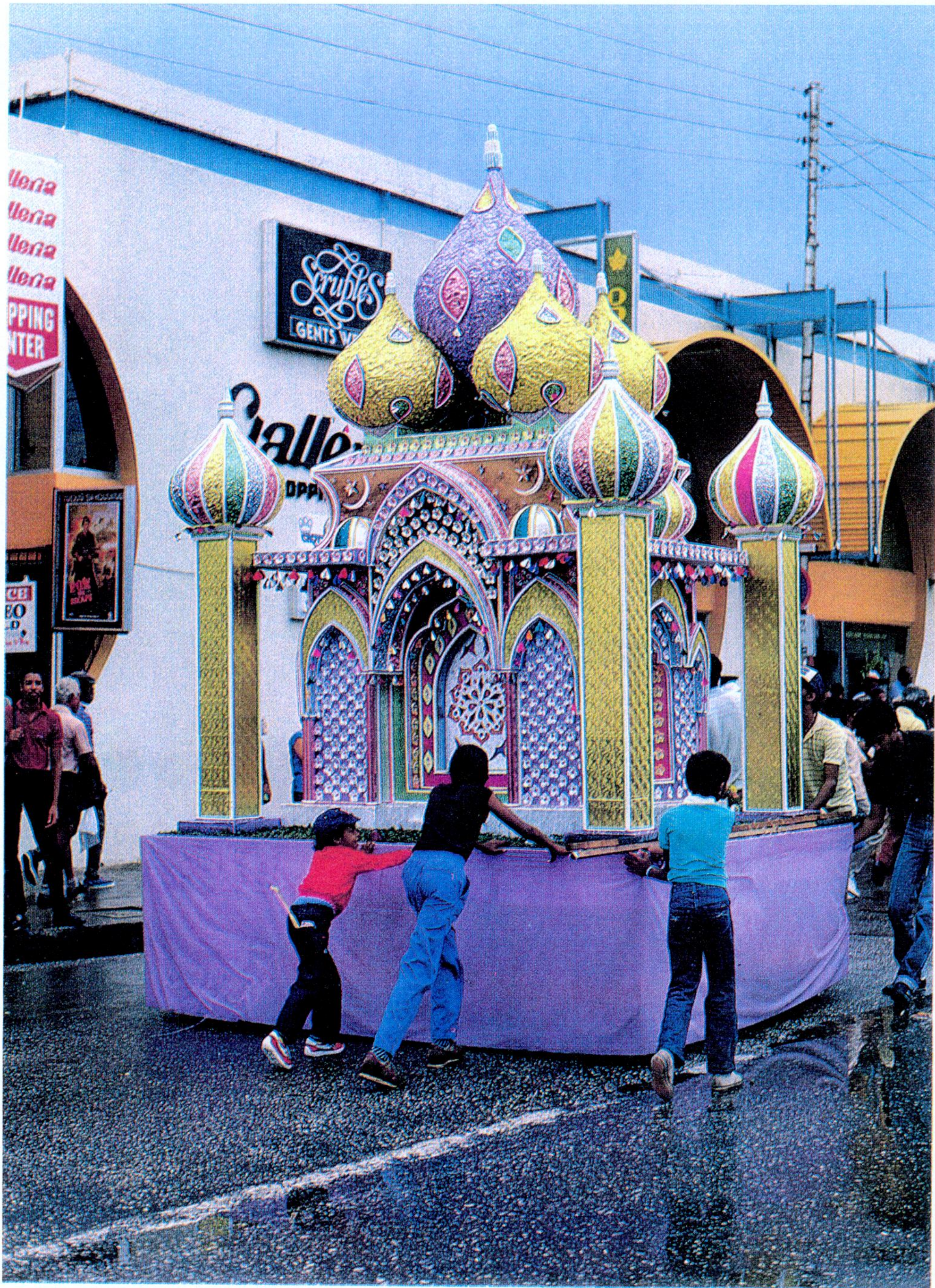
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GENTS

stemmed the labour shortage in the West Indies that had been caused by the abolition of slavery in 1838 and the flight of former slaves from the sugar plantations. In 1917 the British Colonial Office finally took serious interest in the evils of the indentured labour system and abolished it, although their primary concern was not the inhumanity of the system, but rather that World War I had made shipping goods and human beings too dangerous. By the mid-nineteenth century, thousands of East Indians became part of a new racial and cultural reality in the Caribbean, adding to the Euro-African mix. They were landed with their own traditions, musical instruments, body ornamentation and language. By the provisions of indenture these migrants could pursue their customs legally. Foremost among these customs was the Hosay Festival.

Whenever East Indians settled in large numbers in the Caribbean, the Hosay Festival followed, while it served a religious need in the community on the larger scale, it united Hindus, Muslims and others who maintained their East Indian identity. Thus East Indian nationalism became a primary focus of the celebration. As is characteristic of the creolization process, however the participants adapted Hosay specifically to their environment, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Guyanese or any other though the celebration followed a general pattern, artistic considerations and performances differed allowing for every little piece of difference. In Jamaica as in other locations differences between Muslim and Hindu became secondary to their new status. They were both suddenly in the minority, but they shared a common heritage, India. East Indian Muslims are much fewer than are the Hindu in the Caribbean, as is the case in India. But both groups celebrate Hosay as an occasion for East Indian national and ethnic identity.

The historical beginnings of Jonkonnu are similar to that of the Trinidad Carnival. Both were started by European settlers and then taken on by the ex-slaves who changed the festivals into

different forms. During the time of slavery, the Christmas holiday on most estates included three days of free time, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. As Reverend H. Waddell remarked in 1829 "it was hoped that the result of this free time and license would prepare slaves for another year of toil". To be sure, these occasions assumed the character of ritualized freedom or at least ritualized unrestraint many great houses were opened and the slaves invited to a banquet that often included a dance or theatrical event. These performances must have provided controlled outlets for aggression and hostility as well as for theatrical skills. Jonkonnu also could incorporate role reversal. During these opportunities for theatre and festivity the Jonkonnu tradition developed incorporating such African based characters as the Cowhead and African instruments such as the Gumbay drum, as well as such British based characters as the King and Queen or the Squire and the Lady. In the dance itself the merging of African based steps like the hip scoop or legs and European based steps also probably reflects these occasions when all classes were able to observe and even to criticize one another's theatrical skills and to gather aesthetic information. Traditionally celebrated during the Christmas/New Year season, Jonkonnu bears testimony to the process of creolization so typical in the Caribbean. In the Americas, culture does not reflect a total separation between the free and slave or Euro-American and Afro-American sectors. The African influence remained, even if increasingly submerged, as an important element in the process of creolizations. European adaptation or imitations could never be whole or complete. There might be apparent European forms, but the content would be different. A structured public event such as Jonkonnu could incorporate element and energies from many traditions and rituals, white as well as black. Even within the black community, one must assume diversity, for blacks in the Americas do not share a single cultural ancestry, but rather reflect a multifarious African heritage. Thus the festival developed as a diverse and complex melange of many traditions.

CHAPTER 3

THEMES

AESTHETIC SOURCES

Caribbean festivals embody an aesthetic formally rooted in the early European, African and Asian traditions brought to the West Indies between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as from twentieth century publications, broadcasts and artistic movements. Caribbean festival arts are evidence of the transformation worked by a creole aesthetic. During colonial expansion, European sensibilities encompassed a romantic aesthetic that sought the new, the novel and often combined it without the restraint of historical accuracy. In a popular European masquerade costume of the late eighteenth century, for instance, a French woman might dress in a fancy gown while donning an elaborate coiffure with a full-masted ship forming the crest.

Similarly, an ingenious black masquerader Joseph Johnson, paraded the streets of London in the early 1800's wearing on his head a model of "the ship Nelson, which he can, by a bow of thanks, give the appearance of sea-motion". In English folk theatre this penchant for the historical, drawing on Shakespearean dramas became part of mumming performances. These themes also were featured in Caribbean "tea meetings" and similar small theatrical traditions. In the parish of Westmoreland, Jamaica, a band of actor boys used to perform a version of the misadventures of King Henry II, while many nineteenth century chroniclers recorded black bands presenting condensed versions of Richard III. Historical themes are still part of many Carnival celebrations, although now historical accuracy is of primary concern.

The African sensibility of masquerade is also a major focus of festival arts. Despite their different tribal origins, Africans

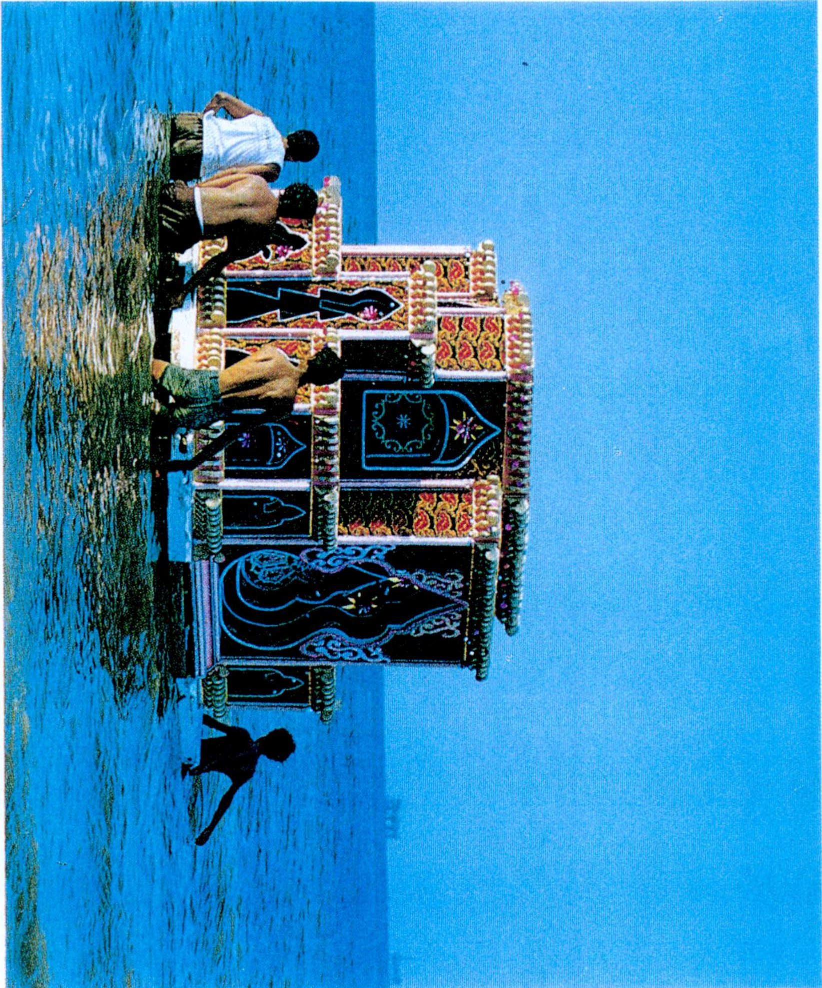
in the Americas understood and practised the masquerade, which combined music, dance, costume, sculpture and drama in a single performance. Traditional African aesthetics also can be characterised as assemblage. In the motherland, animal and human bones, raffia beads, shells, horns, metal and imported cloth might all appear on a single masquerader. The slaves brought these well-tested artistic institutions with them and despite the break-up of families and tribal affiliations, they retained this aesthetic dimension, adding European objects to the costume assemblages. Reports of early Jamaican masquerades describe Africans and their descendants dressed in animal costumes with feathers, mirrors, animal horns, shells and glitter. Later in Carnival and Jonkonnu, animal parts, along with Christmas tree bulbs, sequins, beach balls, plastic whistles, beads and magazine cutouts, would be incorporated into costume making.

East Indian Islam brought to the Caribbean another aesthetic that down-played naturalistic representation and stressed abstract, geometric colourful and all-over patterns. The aesthetic is most magnificently expressed in the ta'ziya made for the Hosay Festival. Since the mid-nineteenth century East Indians of all backgrounds have embraced the Hosay Festival. Large tomb-like structures, with domes, decorated with glittering paper, mirrors, flowers and other colourful objects in assemblage were paraded for all to see. With Hosay another ingredient was added to the aesthetics of Caribbean arts.

Caribbean festival arts still revolve around the aesthetics of assemblage. The makers of festival arts attach items both fabricated and found in the urban environment and natural vegetal and animal materials, to superstructures in layers, resulting in a plethora of textures, colours and collage-like forms. Mirrors are frequently placed over the layer to break up the surfaces by reflecting light onto park areas.

Another quality common to the three festivals is that which art historian Robert Farris Thompson has called a "high-affect" aesthetic. While this quality is enhanced by the modern technology of an urban environment its source is really the individual's desire to stand out in a crowd. Wherever large buildings, the sound of automobiles, machinery and people all compete with the costumes and music, high-affect aesthetics result. One costume in the 1985 Toronto Caribana Festival loomed like a twenty-foot-long jellyfish, its mylar-skinned surface reflecting the building on University Avenue, literally reducing and absorbing them onto the costume.

Initially the first encounters of such diverse populations in public festivals were characterised by both unity and disruption, solidarity and intense competition. In some cases festivals have even harboured rebellions. Despite newspaper condemnation and the restrictions placed on festivals by governments, participants have held fast to the belief that public festivals are the right of the people and they have shared their artistic and aesthetic foundations developing a new iconography. (W Nunley 88" p35). Festivals are no longer regarded as mere rites of reversal, when class struggles and repression can find a public forum, nor as politically neutral expressions. Though they do provide an arena for negotiations in political power, they simultaneously codify and package vibrant arenas of cultural production. As cultural arenas "they have superseded traditional social relations as a basis of shared values and sensitivities. Cultural productions have become the generative basis of myths, lifestyles and even world views". Rex Nettleford, Jamaican scholar and founder of the National Dance Theatre Company, has called the artists of the Caribbean "cultural brokers" collectively mediating internal and external influences in a festival environment, adapting to multi-cultural circumstances. At different points in the twentieth century these festival artists have expressed new or renewed interest in Africa, creolizing traditions gleaned from photographs or publications or movies, or travel blending sources



and meanings. Nettleford describes festivals as "a culture of options". The aesthetics of acculturation, so integral to festival arts, provide the basis for longevity and dynamic expansion.

There is real potential for historical inaccuracy, however in claiming one to one correspondences between twentieth century Caribbean cultural expressions and their African counterparts. Recent research has clearly proven the tribal heterogeneity of the Africans transported to the Americas. In fact as so many of the cultural forms in the Caribbean (Price 1976) indicate, renewed interest in African culture has often inspired new forms, distinct from those based on traditional or tribal retentions. This renewed interest derives from the power of aesthetic expression to codify and enunciate individually while simultaneously declaring solidarity with a people, with a place, with a concept. Using a perceived African or East Indian image or aesthetic form, perhaps a musical instrument or a rhythm provides a viable link with roots, a restatement of historical depth.

Most festival arts are ephemeral, ideas for these arts, however are carried forward from year to year, as they were during the first immigrations to the Americas. More recently photographs have spurred this process. After each festival, sated celebrants still look forward to the next year when "every little piece of difference" will again be assembled and prepared in the artistic kitchens of the Caribbean.

CHAPTER 4

THE FUTURE FOR CARIBBEAN FESTIVALS

FESTIVAL ARTS AND THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Since the late 1930's the Caribbean has brought forth such world class practitioners of literature, music, dance and the plastic arts as Derek Walcott, Uidia Napaul and George Lamming and composers and performers of Trinidad calypso and Jamaica reggae, Lord Kitchener and the Mighty Sparrow from Trinidad and Bob Marley from Jamaica. Within the region itself there is an implosion of energy in the performing arts, Jamaica's National Theatre Company has become a pace setter in the exploration of Caribbean dance-theatre following on the great pioneering work of Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad, Ivy Baxter of Jamaica.

Jamaica's Edna Manley and a fresh school of "intuitive painters" join the renowned Haitian school to complete the network of Caribbean creative artists, confirming the texture of artistic life in the region. Significantly, none of these forms have been able to avoid the impact of the festival arts as a source of energy. The Trinidadian dramatist, playwright and theatre scholar Errol Hill insists that Carnival is a most authentic source since it "has achieved a synthesis between old and new, between folk forms and art forms, between native and alien traditions". He goes on to "enunciate principles" rooted in Carnival that "for the establishment of a national theatre will truly represent the cultural attitudes, expressions and aspirations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago".

A not dissimilar vision guided the efforts of dance theatre in Jamaica, where the National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC) emerged at Jamaica's Independence in 1962 and has since explored movement, music and traditional lore in forging a vocabulary, techniques and style now generally regarded as "Jamaican".

All Caribbean theatre when it chooses, takes on authenticity and authority as long as it employs these Caribbean gifts of artistic expression. Hill's plays, as well as the pantomimes and some of the farces of an admittedly more solemn Jamaica, utilize much verbal imagery, and metaphor for communicating their message. In costuming and stage scenery, Hill is right in claiming for Trinidad a wealth of talent, ideas and innovativeness, all evident in Carnival and reflected in much that is Caribbean theatre today, even at the risk of jeopardising the centrality of dialogue in a drama. Hill stresses as well audience involvement, a feature of Trinidad Carnival. The more reserved Jamaicans have always stood and watched the Jonkonnu bands parade and perform, throwing them money to spur on antics, and reward the inventive. Efforts to introduce street dancing in the annual Independence Festival celebrations have yet to succeed totally in Jamaica. The Trinidad Carnival is made for participation despite the now-established Savannah "march-past" before a paying audience and judges who award prizes to the parading bands. But this merely emphasises another element which Hill points out about the Trinidad Carnival "the procession as a choreographic form and the frequent use of ceremony evident in coronations". The same is true of Jonkonnu and of Hosay. Jamaican dance theatre has drawn heavily on "the procession as a choreographic form". It is a device often missed or misunderstood by metropolitan critics who have neither that sense of space nor openness which is a luxury in crowded cities.

Thus the hankering after cultural definition on the Caribbean's own terms sent Caribbean creative arts to their own sources. As such festivals like Jonkonnu and Carnival and the sources from which they have drawn over centuries take on new meanings in contemporary life. Even when Europe's all pervasive influence persists in the artistic activity and manifestos of the region, the force of these indigenous forms fight back in dialectical defiance.

CHIPPIES

The results are sometimes the better for the confrontation. A production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest" is set in one of the islands of the Caribbean. The noises of that isle are those of the steelpan and the voices of Carnival bands. And it works.

THE FESTIVALS PART IN TOURISM

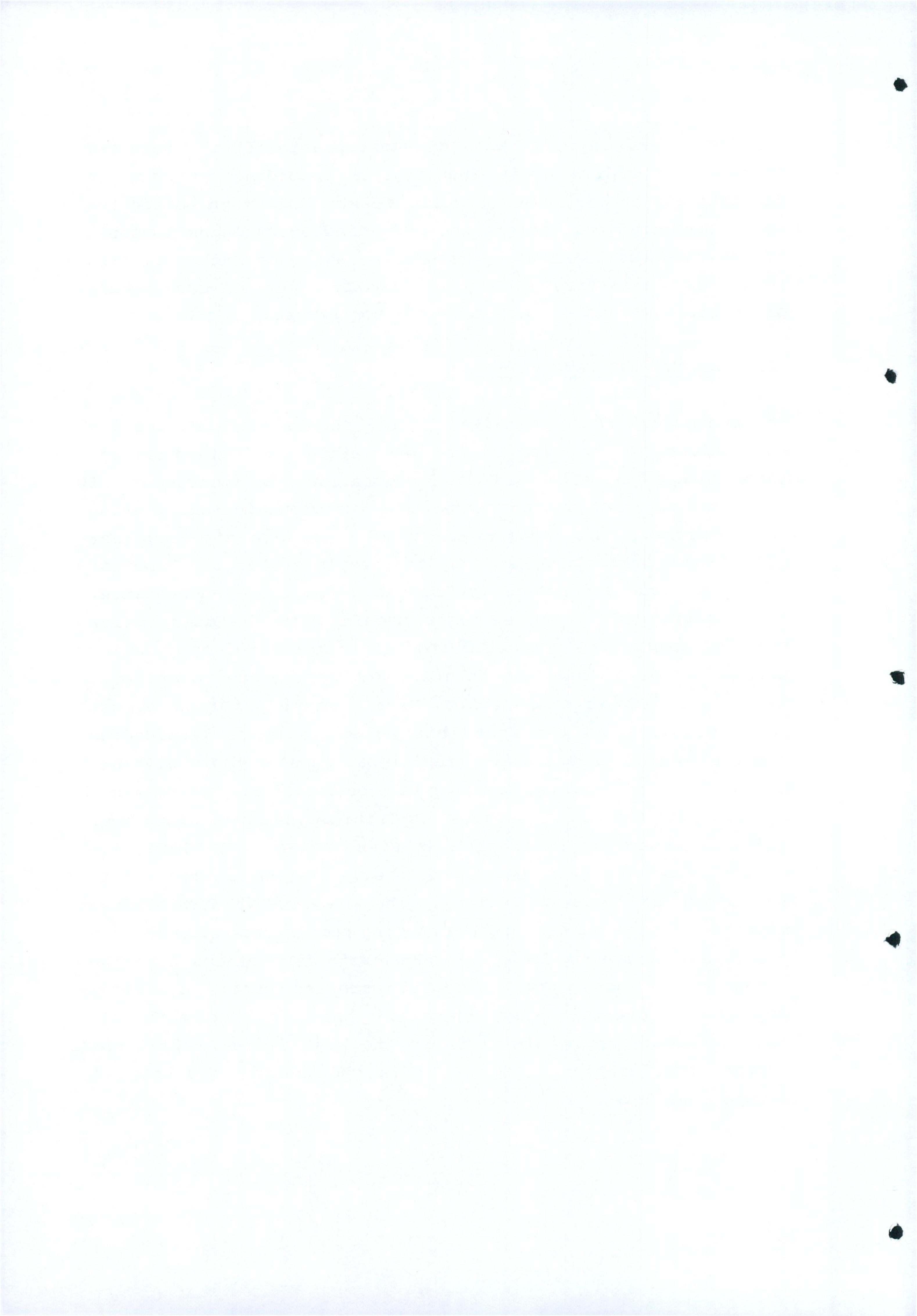
Cultural tourism is important to several Caribbean governments for it is a major source of national income. The idea of festival is given practical expression in the Independence Festival events in July and August. Each year in mid-August there is also the latter day Reggae Sunsplash Festival, a genuine tourist attraction modelled more on the Woodstock Rock Festival than on the traditional indigenous festival arts of Jamaica. The affirmation of the cultural authenticity of Jamaican Reggae by Sunsplash is not lost on the government of Jamaica in its search for genuine national expressions. But hard currency comes with the tens of thousands of reggae revellers from all over the world, and that is regarded as good for an economy starved of foreign currency. Now that the price of oil has declined and the foreign exchange reserves are greatly depleted, there is growing interest in tourism and in the growing role of Carnival in oil producing Trinidad. Trinidad Carnival becomes a prime target for cultural tourism as a potential foreign exchange earner in the planning strategies of a new government.

Festival arts, in traditional terms may not be regarded as profitable or tenured sources of employment, a factor high on the Caribbean's agenda of national concerns. But Trinidad Carnival becomes a year-round occupation for a chosen few who co-ordinate bands and conceptualize the next years display. And in both Trinidad and Jamaica music is the raw material for a thriving recording industry which provides employment for many long after the brief duration of the festivals. The market for recording of calypsos and reggae has definitely grown throughout

the region and beyond. None of these possibilities, cultural tourism, a budding craft industry, a recording industry, a facilitating bureaucracy for cultural administration escape the more aggressive politicians who must find every means possible to maximize the benefits by careful managing of rather limited resources. A cultural policy is formally a part of development plans for Jamaica and more recently for Barbados and St Lucia.

POLITICS AND THE FESTIVALS

The accredited representatives of the people must embrace the aspirations of the mass of the population who vote them in. Independence has meant more about controlling the instruments of political decision-making rather than the economic mobilization of resources. The redistribution of power has affected just about every activity pursued by the people at large. Problems of class, race and ethnicity loom large in post-independence. The question of whose festivals should form the mandate for national expression graduated from topic for muted speculation to one for open study and debate. The controversy over Peter Minshall's "two-act" spectacle "River" in 1983 turned it was felt, not only on the fact that he was a white Trinidadian attempting to change a black traditional popular genre with his Eurocentric innovations, but that he used East Indian tassa drums to accompany his band. Carnival is Trinidadian (read Black West Indian). Hosay is still seen as East Indian! Trinidad like Guyana where over fifty percent of the population is East Indian is deemed to be West Indian. The recency of East Indian migration to the region, and the seeming persistence of authentic elements from mother India, combined with innovations like the appearance of moons in Trinidad, and increased numbers of African descendants playing tassa drums all point to the authentic reconstruction of the festival in the West Indies. With the further creolization of Hosay, this phenomenon is likely to change even more.



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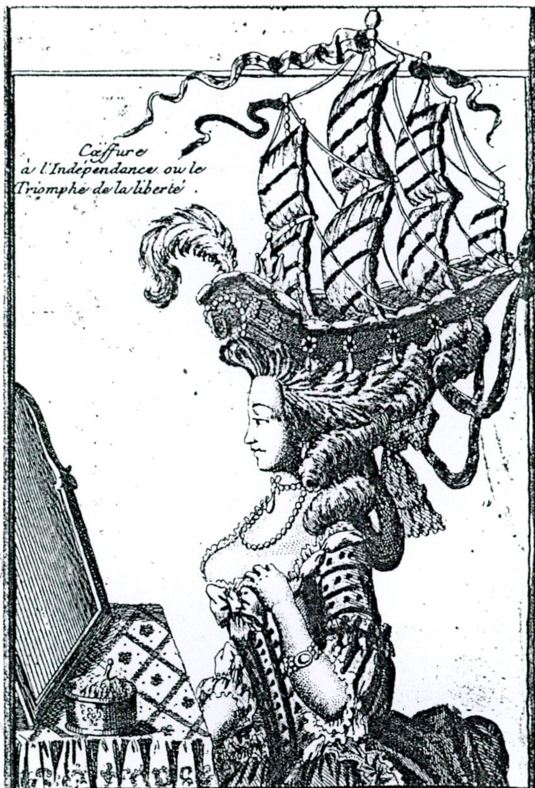
"People power" means then not only numerical majorities but cultural legitimacy in Caribbean terms. Politicians have not been slow to use such popular traditions as festivals to their own ends, as well as to minimize the marginalization of the mass of the population.

Jamaica established a festival commission in 1963 to give national focus to the many village and parish festivals which dated to the turn of the century. All the ingredients of traditional Caribbean festivals were incorporated by a Government anxious to provide unity and cultural focus for a new nation with a disparate social order. Trinidad on the eve of Independence had established a Carnival Development Committee, drawing into its official orbit activities that were the remit of private individuals and groups of citizens. It was necessary not only to ensure order in the hitherto sometimes contentious proceedings, but also to harness a popular pastime into national channels. That these official organisations take pains to projects themselves as facilitators rather than stiflers of popular artistic spontaneity and creativity reveals the extent to which the authenticity of the festivals is jealousy guarded. In any case political directorates would aver that they are merely incorporating the "people's expressions" in order to affirm their legitimacy in and centrality to the new political dispensation in which the mass of the like population are expected to participate not only through their votes, but through their active ongoing exercise of their creativity in giving form and purpose to the new society in Independence. (W Nunley 1988 p189). At worst such political "interventions" are dismissed as bread and circus appropriations of the people's creativity. Thus there is no shortage of adverse criticism of officialdoms dominating too much of the Trinidad Carnival and Jamaican post-colonial National Festival. Some people see the phenomenon as a means of social control through the politicization of art, ethics and the creative imagination. Others see the intervention by Government into festival arts activities as one of the surest

guarantees of social cohesion, as provision for needed patronage either through direct money assistance or through such institutional and operational frameworks. Still cynicism abounds, in certain quarters it is felt that governments, in an effort to control the initiative of the masses, feel it more expedient to join than to alienate them. So they exact loyalties by obligating the people to officialdom rather than leaving them to take their innovations into directions that may not be "in the national interest" (as perceived by the new power-wielders) or may be construed to constitute a crime against the social order. In any case, the history of bannings throughout the region by the old colonial power did nothing to stop the growth and development of such festivals. Rather, the "oppression" served as soil for nurturing such festivals, which grew in proportions to haunt the frightened governors. Small wonder that post-colonial native politicians decided to avoid this.

DIASPORIC DIFFUSION

The continuous scattering of Caribbean people in the waves of twentieth century migration to metropolitan centres has diffused festival arts weaned in the Caribbean to places like London, New York and Toronto. The festival arts again act as a means of cultural expression, survival and social demarginalisation in a hostile environment. Within the Caribbean region itself such diffusion had been apace. In earlier times, if the records are to be trusted, Jamaican Jonkonnu apparently spread to Belize and the Bahamas, Masquerade in the Leeward Islands of Antigua, St Kitts and Montserrat benefitted from the cross-fertilizing, London now has more texture in August for having to struggle with the Notting Hill Carnival which is developing characteristics different to its parent in Port-of-Spain in Trinidad. Brooklyn, New York does "Catch Afire" each Summer, ignited by the Caribbean Festival, and Toronto can no longer deny the presence of a sizeable West Indian population, reaffirmed by the annual Caribbean Festival mounted there, if by nothing else.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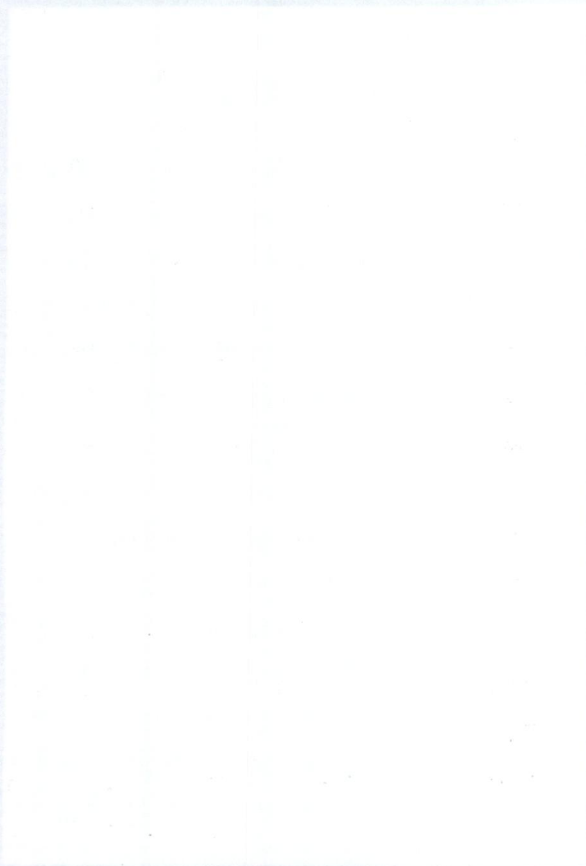

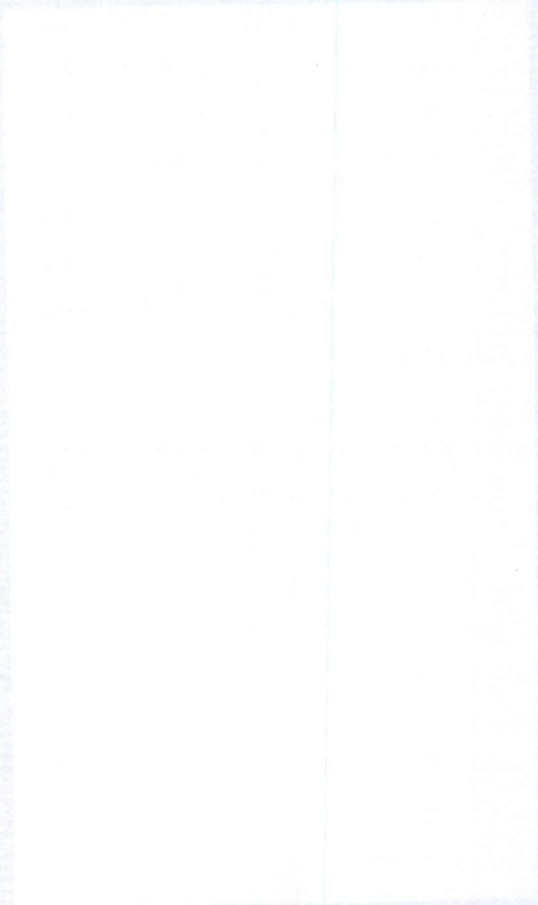

Common items of cultural engagement within the Caribbean crop up at these events staged by migrant citizens with yearnings for psychic, if not physical return. The consequences are far reaching for the region "back home". As a mobilizing force, such festivals have not failed to convince home governments of the need to find a place for millions of diasporic Caribbean people in the regions plans for its own development.

Caribbean festivals far away from source, continue to provide for Caribbean people, as Kwabena Nketiah remarked "a vehicle for communication, and affirming the values of the society they leave behind, and for strengthening the cultural bonds that binds them". They can also guarantee the migrants psychic survival and existence beyond survival. In the changed circumstances of diasporic existence the festivals are appropriately revised and re-scheduled, Carnival in protestant and often-times cold London, as well as in ecumenical Brooklyn, is held in the heat of Summer rather than in pre-Lenten February or March.

They will long continue, these festivals to have a strong place in the organization of social life in Caribbean society at home and abroad.

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CONCLUSION

The resourcefulness of people in exercising their creative imagination, even in bondage, is a common theme in the human story. The Caribbean is no exception. Under slavery, the mass of the population uprooted from West and Central Africa guaranteed to themselves cultural continuities as salve for the suffering caused by the severance. They adapted and adjusted, creating in the end expressions appropriate to their new circumstances by way of encounters with the Europeans acting as economic masters or colonial overlords, with others of their ilk, first aboard ship and later on the plantation, and with indigenous Amerindians, Arawaks and Caribs who were already decimated by the onslaught of alien diseases and imposed overwork. The survival of that horde of involuntary workers in new lands became their priority, and all means within their command were found to protect themselves in their vulnerable capacities as chattel and dehumanized zombies at the beck and call of callow, callous men and the brutal systems they operated. Flight and guerrilla assault against plantations and oppressors were not their only options. Alternatives which manifested world views and protection from the obscene violations of vile and venal predators were more readily at hand. The festival was one such means. A few days rest from labour was critical to the operations of the festivals that emerged throughout the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as variations on a theme. But the sustaining lifeblood of these events was the creation by the participants of masks to disguise, of music to affirm, of dances to celebrate, as well as the germination of ideas beyond the reach of those who brutishly supervised them for the rest of the year.

As with the "Africans" in slavery, so with the new wave of East Indian migrants in indenture, the form of contract labour which continued the tradition of labour exploitation after slavery was abolished. Hosay is a later manifestation of that process. The

Caribbean in the twentieth century has turned to the very process and its products to meet the demands of contemporary existence and to shape a future to call its own. All mechanisms of affirmation become part of the quest for appropriate designs for social living. The still-developing notion of an emergent Caribbean civilization, defining itself on its own terms, serves to inform the practical program of nation-building and the challenging strategies of development.

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