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Calypso: Effecting Conflict Transformation Through the Indigenous Calypso Art-Form

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Abstract

The calypso, which forms an integral part of the carnival celebrations of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, is a syncretic popular art-form that has its origin in Africa. The art-form, having been influenced and adapted by the experiences of enslaved Africans in the Diaspora, has been fused in the vortex of plantation society. Today, the music of carnival has evolved considerably, with the calypso becoming one of the cornerstones of the carnival celebration. This paper looks at aspects of the subset of political calypsos that offer commentary on the socio-political and/or economic issues in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinbago). It recognizes these calypsos as bedded in the popular practice of ritual resistance. In doing so this paper fuses the very diverse fields of ritual communication and “Conflict Transformation” with “Trinbago” history and culture. Hence, this text is not steeped in the ideological paradigm of a single academic discipline. The very nature of this work requires that it encompasses the dynamic interplay between popular art, music, language, calypso, and an understanding of the approaches and methods of Conflict Transformation, establishing a symmetrical balance between all of these fields. This article recognises the pre-existing formal and informal modes of dispute resolution. In extending on that duality, it adds a third non-formal cultural model of community conflict management which embodies the process of Conflict Transformation as described by Bush and Folger (1994), as this is applicable to Trinidad and Tobago’s local, temporal context. By adding this new set of intellectual tools, this paper enables the recognition of the language of the political calypso as Symbolic Action (Burke, 1966) in a process of Conflict Transformation.

Introduction

It is well recognized that the instrument of the calypso plays a central role in the culture of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Be this as it may, it is interesting to observe that very little work, if any, has been done to explore the various functions that the art-form satisfies. Addressing this deficiency, this work focuses on
the role served by the subset of calyposos¹ that offer commentary on social, political and/or economic issues. In the course of examining one of the functions of this subset of calypsos, this work draws from the fields of dialogue theory, alternative dispute resolution and cultural studies, as it adds to the field of legal anthropology, showing how calypsos engage simultaneously in the reciprocal process of inviting and reflecting social movement.

In focusing on calypso music in this way, this text offers insights to how calypsos mediate the challenge for acknowledgement, equality and sustained representation in the social, political and/or economic matrix of Trinidad and Tobago. It is this concept that Charles Tilly (1998) succinctly expressed when he penned the expression: “Contentious conversations between challengers and powerholders” (p125).

This paper, therefore, explores aspects of the capacity of the calypsonian who, using Linguistic Form, skilfully frames a collective identity through the adroit use of emotion coupled with appropriate narrative to engage political transformation, which inevitably, is usually accompanied by aspects of social conflict. Under these circumstances, it seems appropriate to engage in an examination of the role of calypsonians as “leaders” in collective action (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Mattern, 1998), with a view to understanding how this role is mediated. This approach to a different understanding of the political calypso is therefore underpinned by the view that this type of calypso can animate public action, and that political calypsonians may serve as leaders in that process.

In the context of the dearth of available research in this area of indigenous methods of dispute resolution, this paper addresses aspects of the use of language in calypsos that offer commentary on the social, political and/or economic issues that occur for people living in Trinidad and Tobago, and the wider Caribbean region.

This text then goes on to show how, while these calypsonians engage in a process of entertaining their audiences, simultaneously, they are attempting a transformation of the political communication with the power brokers (Lees-Marshment, 2004; Meyer, 2002; Marshall, 1997; Mancini & Swanson, 1996).

In making a significant contribution to the fields of Dispute Resolution and Legal Anthropology this article augments the link between methods of dispute resolution and culture in concurrence with Clifford Geertz’s expressed view that

¹ In this article, I have elected to use the words “kaiso” and “calypso” interchangeably. I have also used “calypso” to represent the singular and calypsos to represent the plural form. For ease of reference, in referring to The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago I use either of the words Trinidad or Trinbago to embrace the duality of the two-island state. Similarly, readers will also recognize the use of the word Trinbagonians as one of the ways that I will refer to the combination of people who populate the islands. Except where otherwise indicated, throughout this text, I have elected to use italics to indicate quotations.
law is a type of social abstraction that is driven by culture and imagination and is designed to regulate social life. Geertz argued that there is a direct relationship and correspondence between law on the one hand and myth, ritual, ideology, art or classification systems focused on structures of meaning, especially on the symbols and systems of symbols through whose agency such structures are formed, communicated and imposed (Geertz, 1983, p. 182).

Black Music Genres and Performance Styles

Based on her research into the American traditions of black music, Maultsby argues that the established musical traditions of enslaved Africans derived from their African heritage. Over the years, and certainly after Emancipation, these customs evolved in response to the local demands and the circumstances of the environment, where “each generation of slaves and freeborn blacks created new musical genres and performance styles” (Maultsby, 1991, p. 185).

Although Maultsby’s conceptual framework for the musical genres and performance styles of African American music does not expressly mention calypso music, there is no doubt that the experiences of the enslaved African Americans were similar to those Africans who were enslaved in the Caribbean. It therefore seems reasonable to surmise that were this framework to be rewritten to include all the musical genres within the Diaspora, depending on the slant of any given calypso, each would be regarded as falling under general heading of “African American Secular Traditions.” Accordingly, both Calypso and Soca would be grouped respectively under the subheadings that emerged during the 1600s that are labelled as: 1) “Work Songs, Field/Street Calls, Protest Songs” and 2) “Game Songs, Social Songs.”

In her discussion on the role of African American musical forms, and the aspects of these that have been retained in “formal and informal settings.” Maultsby recognizes the fundamental concept underlying music performance in African and African-derived cultures. She contends that “music-making is a participatory group activity that serves to unite black people into a cohesive group for a common purpose” (Maultsby, 1991, p. 187).

The Relationship Between Political Theatre and Dispute Resolution Systems

Both Lahusen (1996) and Eyerman and Jamison (1998) have shown how popular culture, but more specifically music, provides a praxis for shaping different understandings of the events of the world. These authors show how music and culture serve as agents for rallying potential constituents. This approach is helpful in that it enables us to understand and see how certain types of calypsonians function as neo-political activists, working for social justice, on behalf of the op-
pressed and the poor. Under these circumstances, the events of the calypso tent and Dimanche Gras become political theatre, mirroring the worlds of many citizens. This quasi-theatrical process, reflecting the social, political, and/or economic matrix of the worlds of many Trinbagonians as it does, when presented in this type of theatrical setting, permits the issues to be more easily assimilated by the citizens. This is so because it employs a system and approach where the social construction of meaning is embedded in symbols and experiences that are easily recognizable to the people who are living and sharing them.

In a universal sense, functioning in this way the political calypsonians can be seen as political activists, using their performance as a tool, within a radical theatre of liberation. Within this setting they fuse their political awareness and commitment with their artistic sensibilities, in a process of becoming an agent provocateur. In the course of doing so, the calypso tent becomes a sort of theatre of agitation, within which the calypsonian fulfils the function, which in the history of resistance movements came to be identified as Agit-prop.²

In this role, calypsonians seek to create a cognitive praxis, defining a framework for the presentation of the struggle of “the man in the street” in a way that our local cultural meaning mediates the efforts of these social movement activists, through the organization of the calypso tent. This approach, inadvertently engaging the ideology of emancipatory theatre as it does, facilitates marrying an alternative view of popular local events with respect to political concerns, as calypsonians use this type of theatre to lever the society towards self-created opportunities.

As an example of this process, consider the following lyrics which are an extract from the calypso: “Leaning,” that was sung by Francois Ottley during the 2012 Calypso Monarch semifinal competition that was held at Skinner Park, San Fernando. This calypso addresses the issue of the failure of the United National Congress (UNC)-led government to extradite two wealthy financiers of the UNC political party to the United States, where they are wanted for trial for money laundering offences . . . :

Madam Justice is a queen to me
A woman of honour and objectivity
Her principles without question shows no favour or affection
A fair judgement was her guarantee
But as of late I have my suspicion

² The term Agit-prop is an amalgamation formed from syllables of the words “agitatsiia” and “propaganda.” The activity, which had its origin in the post-Revolutionary Soviet Union, served as a powerful and effective mechanism of politically educating the population at large. The objective was to inculcate and promote appropriate social class values among the masses. Its methods were delivered through palaces of culture, i.e., using agitation trains, cars, poster campaigns, and numerous agitation centers, or “agitpunkts.”
As she stands with feet of clay
No longer holds her upright position
To the sounds of wealth, she moves and sways

Leaning, ah catch Justice leaning
She leaning against a wall and the owner, look he money standing tall
Leaning, ah catch Justice leaning
With the big shots she is always aligned
Leaning ah catch Justice leaning
Once you have wealth and influence you are set free despite the evidence
Leaning, ah catch justice leaning
Leaning in this land called T & T
So try as they may to fool you and me
Justice is not for everybody
It’s plain to see, Justice is not for everybody (“Leaning” by Francois Ottley)

It is important to the culture of Trinidad and Tobago that the important function of the calypsonian, of addressing the ills within our society does not go unrecognized and subsequently undervalued. So important is this function within the community that their role needs to be recognized and situated in the context of the wider domain of international political activists. In reality, the role that these calypsonians play belongs to a relatively recently developed tradition known as “celebrity politics.” Hence, this text contends that calypsonians who offer commentary of the social, economic and/or political events occurring within the country, join a well established international list of political activists who, although they may not all have been singers and/or performers, nevertheless, have gained their pedigree as “politicos” through one form of political action or another.

The range of established celebrity politician is wide, spanning many fields, including not just well known performers and singers like Bob Geldoff and Bono, but also ministers of religion and sporting personalities. They include the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, who as the current leader of the Nation of Islam, owes his current status as a political activist to his beginnings as a calypsonian, singing in Chicago nightclubs with the sobriquet “The Charmer.” In the America of the 1950s, rife with racism and inequality, Farrakhan then migrated towards the burgeoning civil rights movement. Other celebrity politicians are Rev. Al Sharpton who worked for the underprivileged in New York, while also supporting the call for funding to improve neglected inner-city and rural schools, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his fight against the injustices and racial equality in the United States. Another such leader is the Rev. Jesse Jackson who strove to be a political representative for the underprivileged, playing a pivotal role in many of the movements for empowerment, peace, civil rights, gender equality, and economic and social justice. Both Malcolm X and Mahatma Ghandi can also be identified as subscribing to the tradition of celebrity politicians.
Quite apart from calypsonians, the research conducted by West and Orman (2003) shows that many other well established entertainers have also contributed to the area of celebrity politics. These include household names like Clint Eastwood, Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda, Charlton Heston, Barbara Streisand, Oprah Winfrey, Warren Beatty, Robert Redford, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Martin Sheen, to mention just a few.

The field of celebrity politics has not been limited to performers and entertainers but also extends to include sports and athletic politicos as well, such as Magic Johnson, Muhammad Ali, Jim Bunning, Steve Largent and Bill Bradley (West & Orman, 2003).

Understanding the scope of the process in which this subset of calypsonians engage invites a new appreciation of the political theatre of the Skinner Park semi-finals, the Dimanche Gras show and the various calypso tents around the country. In this revised view, these venues become places where attempts are made to raise the audience’s awareness, getting them to be conscious of the power they have to transform the conflict and/or ameliorate the disputes that they face in their lives. This recognition bridges the events of the calypso tent, Skinner Park and/or Dimanche Gras with aspects of the attributes of the process of Conflict Transformation.

**Conflict Transformation**

In this text, I have assumed the meaning of the term Conflict Transformation as used by Bush and Folger (1994) in their groundbreaking and seminal work entitled *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict through Empowerment and Recognition*, as this more accurately describes the processes engaged in by the subset of political calypsonians in Trinidad and Tobago.

It would be incorrect and inappropriate not to recognize that conflict is an intrinsic part of life in any community and by implication, also in Trinidad and Tobago. Isenhart and Spangle contend that “conflict is a vital social function where tensions are released and new communal norms are established or refined….Conflicts force parties to deal with deeper issues and thus serve as a constructive social process” (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000, p.9). In reality, conflict is always lurking, it does not really go away, i.e., conflicts cannot really be resolved but they can be managed. Conflict offers an opportunity to learn, to make choices that result from that learning, and thus to choose to change the way we view a specific set of circumstances or situation, and subsequently take action in the direction of that changed view. So the goal of this transformational process is to enable audiences “to move beyond solutions to transforming relationships. The transformational mediator attempts to influence interaction patterns, change how
the partners talk about themselves and each other” (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000, p.10).

Hence, the conflicts that occur, of which calypsonians sing, are not necessarily and always resolved. Frequently though, through listening to these calypsos audiences are empowered. They begin to recognize, to think, to reflect and discuss the issues being presented by the calypsonians. It is this process of “Empowerment and Recognition” as discussed by Bush and Folger (1994) which I contend can lead individuals within an audience to identify the options they have that can make an impact, thereby bringing about a constructive change or the process of Conflict Transformation.

This notion of transformation that I am advancing sees the idea of peace as being intrinsically connected with that of social justice, right relationships, and human rights, within a social structure. This is quite in opposition to what is customarily referred to as “conflict resolution wherein one party may feel co-opted to succumb, for the sake of either making or maintaining peace. In supporting the view that the term conflict resolution is an oxymoron, Wallenstein (1991) argues that solutions do not necessarily show up as resolution and contends that what could be seen as resolution of conflict can in many settings actually perpetuate the inequality or injustice that initially generated the dispute.

It is for these reasons that to my mind, the phrase Conflict Transformation seems more appropriate and relevant than either of the phrases conflict management or conflict resolution, which are customarily associated with processes of peacemaking. My problems with these two terms stem from my work as a practitioner in the field of dispute resolution, where I have come to recognize that the conflicts which occur as a natural part of life are an inevitable part of the triadic process of learning, growth, and change. Hence, I subscribe to the view that conflicts are entirely different from disputes. Being an intrinsic part of life conflicts provide a sort of undercurrent for life that edges our learning processes forward. Ultimately, this approach leads to the recognition that while disputes can be resolved, conflict cannot really be eradicated from society. Embracing this approach, we arrive at a place where we begin to see why the term Conflict Resolution is an oxymoron. More significant though, this term suggests co-opting. This idea of going along can be seen as an attempt to minimize the conflict, when the legitimate issues being brought to the table by at least one party are not being fully regarded. This type of quick fix Conflict Resolution approach to a people’s deep socio-political problem, oft-times gives way to verbosity without any of the significant action that leads to subsequent, substantive change. The unfortunate aspect of that approach is its failure to incorporate the real transformations needed in order to move from an attempt to “just create peace” as opposed to that of “having achieved justice.” This alternative idea of “Conflict Transformation” to which this text subscribes, embraces an idea of the establishment of social struc-
tures that both scaffold and sustain the development of right relationships and constructive change, through a respect for fundamental human rights.

In the final analysis, it is helpful to reflect on Bush and Folger’s summary of the value of this Transformational approach. They contend:

The strongest reason for believing that the transformational story should guide mediation is the story’s underlying premise: that the goal of transformation—that is, engendering moral growth towards both strength and compassion—should take precedence over the other goals mediation can be used to obtain, even though these other goals are themselves important. It makes sense to see transformation as the most important goal of mediation, both because of the nature of the goal itself and because of the mediator’s special capacity to achieve it. (Bush & Folger, 1994, pp.28–29)

This concept of Conflict Transformation is bedded in an understanding of the difference between action and motion. The difference between these two as they apply to this text can be illustrated by considering a stone rolling down a hill. While such freefalling movement of the stone can be regarded as motion, on the other hand, should someone take the stone and throw it, this activity is an action. This text therefore recognizes not just the lyrics, but all of the words that calypsonians use while on stage, as “Symbolic Action.”

This text is therefore set against the backdrop of Kenneth Burke’s concept of “Language as Symbolic Action.” The approach exemplifies a theory of language, a philosophy based on the theory, and methods of analysis that are based on the theory and the philosophy. This process is known as “Dramatism” (Burke, 1966). As such, this way of looking at language invites an opportunity to move beyond seeing words as just labels to help in the categorization and identification of objects, rather, words, but more specifically in this case, the words of the political calypsos become “Symbolic Actions.” These actions which manifest as the lyrics of political calypsos now become descriptions of situations.

This approach is important, opening as it does a new doorway to understanding and interpreting the localised form of entertainment in Trinidad and Tobago. In this example I have specifically chosen this set of Aloes’ words as it illustrates the process of Dramatism that has already been discussed in this paper. Kindly note that the words in brackets [ ] are my explanations of his urging the process of Conflict Transformation, as displayed in the preamble to this rendition of his calypso.

This process of language as Symbolic Action, on which this work focuses, is beautifully illustrated in the Revue Tent by Sugar Aloes’ preamble to the calypso “My Observation.” This example shows how as Aloes speaks to the audience, he uses language that nudges them to remember certain specific incidents:

“Al yuh enjoying the show?”
“Al yuh missing anybody? Neither we, Tasha fall-in for Denyse, Super fall-in for, what he name ...Bomber. We have Steve Sealy falling in for DeFosto. And we could go on and on, right? But give yourself a round of applause for supporting a tent that had exist for 43 years and still going strong. And we ent care what no body say, if after 43 years, for the first time we ask for a little help, we well deserve it.”

“All yuh reading about [In the newspaper] is Revue get [$]85 million, two days before that, they say that Chutney get [$]280 million, nobody ent talking about that.”

“Ah think dat is more than wat we get ent?” [demonstration of getting the audience to think critically about this situation].

[He then neutralises the situation with these words] “Ahhhh but doh bother with that, every brook have to get a little water . . . do bother with that.” (Aloes preamble to the Calypso My Observation sung in The Revue Tent 2006)

As part of his preamble Sugar Aloes then turns to the direct introduction of his calypso thus:

“Ah want to do something here, ah breaking it down slow so that all yuh could understand what a saying because if ah do it fast the thing does go over alyuh head, and al yuh doesn’t understand, but this is reality, this one ent name face reality enh, not me!” [demonstration of Aloes’ direct communication with the cognitive ability of the audience].

“Dis one is called ‘My Observation’ and ah go bring back some things for all yuh to remember to” [example of Aloes engaging the audience in the important process of cognition or recognition] “Le’we go.”

In this calypso “My Observation,” which is a critical observation on the due processes of law as he sees it applied in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, he invites his audience to engage thinking processes through his attempt to create cognitive dissonance, while inviting them thus: “See if alyuh remember this one.” In this way he further nudges his audience in a process where his words then become “symbolic action.”

**My Observation by Sugar Aloes (Real Name: Michael Osuna)**

I made ah serious observation, couple years ago  
And my findings really disturb me, I want yuh to know  
Every time we hold a criminal in high society  
By the time the matter reach the courts  
They get away Scott-free  
Whether it’s a priest, a lawyer, or a politician  
It seems like the wheels of justice greased with corruption  
I find we should check out the system, cause listen my friend  
It looks like the UNC no more law than the PNM
Cause Gopeesingh, get away Scott-free
And Bill Chaitan, they never charge he
If a poor black man did commit that crime and boast
All now so he in jail getting he ass roast
But Gypsy, get away Scott-free
Galbaransingh, he free already
Once the UNC put their lawyers on the trail
None ah dem doesn’ make no jail

See if all yuh remember this one [Aloe’s spoken words to the audience]
Police found some coke and a missile, in a water tank
Town say that they must charge the fella, I’m telling you frank
With that kind of evidence in hand, so the critics say
As a big UNC minister, he can’t get away
I was even hearing talks you may not believe me
People say he control the two gangs in Lavantille
PNM supports plan that day, Panday start to ball
Investigation was stopped,
As yuh know the man wasn’t charged at all.

Lewis Gomez, get away Scott free
And Sadiq Baksh, they never charge he
If the police did find all that coke by Cro Cro
The midget would be making jail until he grow
But Richardson, get away Scott-free
Brian Kuei Tung, he free already
Once they have Karl Hudson-Philip jamming the tail
None ah dem doesn’t make a jail

In the calypso above Aloes uses appropriate language that challenges the audience to identify the ridiculousness of our legal system. He brings to their memory some key events that illustrate the state of the legal processes in the country. He helps them to recognize the disparity in how the wealthy and powerful are regarded and how the “poor black man” is treated. The request is to “Check out the system” because we need to listen, to heed the signals of the demise both of, and within, the society.

**The Development of Legal Processes in the New World**

Traditionally, in the field of Legal Anthropology, the resolution of disputes is divided into *formal* and *informal* approaches, with the formal process referring to the due process of law, as takes place in a courtroom. The informal speaks to the processes of mediation, negotiation and arbitration that take place in a more informal setting.
This work extends on the duality of the formal and informal approaches to dispute resolution. It shows how with respect to the local Trinidad and Tobago situation, the political theatre of emancipation, as manifest through the calypso tents, the Skinner Park semi-finals and the Dimanche Gas show, offers a third “non-formal” strand to the field of dispute resolution.

As with many other colonized countries, in Trinidad, the very practice of colonialism propagated the imperial power’s metropolitan legal system throughout its territories, imposing this as the formal process to be used when resolving disputes. However, for those early enslaved Africans, there were significant differences occurring between the available structures for resolving disputes in the territories of the New World compared to those available in the colonies of either the African continent or the Indian sub-continent. These differences resulted from the fact that imperialism in the African continent, like the Indian sub-continent, was imposed on people who were already well established in their own homeland, having their own operational socio-cultural systems that included well recognized methods for resolving their disputes. The emergent dispute resolution systems in these colonial societies were a form of legal pluralism where a hegemonic colonial power shaped the formation of a formal dispute resolution process, while the parallel, local, informal system continued to coexist. For the reasons embedded in the complexity of the social, political and economic matrix that drove developments in Trinidad, this structure was not mirrored for the newly arrived enslaved Africans.

Prior to their being supplanted in Trinidad, this composite group of Africans, coming to this New World from different social systems, and now arriving as slaves, had been used to a variety of socio-cultural systems that ranged from chiefdoms to acephalous societies. In their new Caribbean homeland, the Africans collectively became an amalgamation of disorientated, disempowered, bemused people, from a range of different socio-cultural systems, having neither a sense of community, nor continuity, nor a common language with which to communicate.

Newly arrived in Trinidad, these totally disorientated people, found themselves in submissive bondage, with their primary drive being survival. Within these complex dynamics of subordination and struggle, the Africans, although numerically superior, were not of the mindset that allowed them to entertain either the idea of implementing a unified dispute resolution system, or the resurrection of one to which any of them had hitherto been accustomed. On the other hand, for their part, the migrant Europeans now residing in Trinidad already had

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3 I have not used Trinidad and Tobago because at this time the islands were not a dual island state (Phillips, 2009).
their own imported formalized dispute resolution system, which became the *de facto* system for the application of justice.

The 1797 change in imperial governance from Spanish to English, supplanting Hispanic law with British law, engendered accompanying tensions within the Trinidad community (Wood, 1968). This further impeded the capacity of the African slaves to form an integral, informal structure for the resolution of disputes among either themselves or between themselves and their slave masters. This absence from Trinidad's enslaved African population of the formal/informal legal pluralism that existed in either Africa or the Indian sub-continent, was sustained for some considerable time.

Writing in 1947 in relation to the microcosm of the Trinidad Village of Toco, Herskovits and Herskovits comment that most of the villagers, being born elsewhere, had no long, common local tradition that was supported by established customs. As a consequence, their research identified that the procedure for the resolution of disputes was through a Court system that was entirely of European origin (Herskovits & Herskovits, 1947). My research into the availability of dispute resolution processes in pre-20th century Trinidad showed that apart from the Panchyats system of dispute resolution, imported to Trinidad and Tobago with the arrival of the Asians, there were no other informal dispute resolution systems existing on the island, let alone any bespoke system available to the African population corresponding to those available in either continental Africa or the Indian sub-continent.

Quite apart from this, the 1950s, 60s and 70s temporarily gave rise to an informal system of resolution wherein respected members of the community (Priests, Head-Teachers, the Post Master/Mistress, and the Village Police Officer) assumed an informal role of peacemaker in local disputes.

Within the relatively recent past, Trinidadians and Tobagonians have grown in their awareness of the potential use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) for resolving disputes, with a corresponding increase in commitment to the mediation process as evidenced by the Mediation Act 2004. Currently, various state and private bodies, following mainly a North American model of mediation, offer certain types of disputing parties the opportunity to informally resolve their disputes.4

The 1980s saw legal anthropologists developing a concern for meaning and power, hence drawing from the theoretical orientations of different disciplines, producing enriched and expanded theoretical frameworks that provided a bridge

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4 The legal introduction of the mediation process into the sphere of available approaches to Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management in Trinidad and Tobago, has opened the door for us to, not just whole heartedly import models from overseas but to see how we can tailor our indigenous skills and abilities to address our local need.
between aspects of the social sciences and law (Comaroff & Roberts, 1981; Starr & Collier, 1989; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Comaroff, 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). These newer innovations sought to combine the areas of dispute processes in a social context, with notions of how legal institutions and actors create and transform meaning within the context of their particular cultural framework.

This work from the colonial and post-colonial worlds was taken up from the late 1970s and drawn upon in the process of the renovation of metropolitan legal systems. The ensuing shift in orientation from formal to informal processes for resolving disputes has been accompanied both in metropolitan centres and in the post-colonial world with new understandings of theories of dominance and resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

**Social Actors Within the Calypso Tent**

Whether personal, national or international, on close examination, we find that the situations generating tension and surrounding conflict usually come with a complete cast, as the parties involved play out their respectively assigned roles within the confines of a “script.” Hence, existing in the mind of each party to the conflict, there is a villain, a hero and a victim with a designated supporting cast. When functioning in this type of environment, it can be required of the mediator to constantly oscillate between a number of theatrical roles. Hence at any one time a mediator could see him/herself being a director (e.g., as s/he tries to break the impasse), or perhaps the script writer (e.g., as s/he reframes a situation) or even at times as an actor (e.g., as s/he tries to sustain neutrality and impartiality). These roles are similar to those of the calypsonians who try to influence and persuade an audience through their stage presentation and need to be seen against the earlier discussion of the process of “Dramatism.”

Set as it is against the backdrop of the discussions around ideological conditions of legal anthropology and the implications of these conditions for this discourse, this approach enables a vision primarily of calypsonians, and secondarily their audiences, as social actors in political theatre, both engaging and demonstrating their potential for human action or agency within a *Matrix of Domination* (Collins, 1990). It invites an understanding of how calypsonians like Gypsy, Chalkdust, Sugar Aloe’s, Cro Cro, Luta (to mention just a few) through the medium of the lyrics of such calypsos as “Sinking Ship,” “Chauffeur Wanted,” “My Observation,” “Say Ah Prayer,” and “All Inclusive Party,” respectively, influence the social creation, maintenance and alteration of structure. In the process of

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5 *Matrix of Domination* refers to the dynamic interaction of the combination: race, class and colour. It addresses the disempowered effect of the interactive and reinforcing process that exists between these attributes, not as individual attributes in themselves, but only in relation to the interaction between the various attributes as these affect and influence inequality.
achieving this outcome, these calypsonians engage in articulating an *Inequality Problematic* in the emancipatory theatre of the calypso tent/Dimanche Gras show, where they relate a perspective on a localized situation in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

This being the case, from my perspective as an indigenous ethnographer, using an interpretive framework, I define a *non-formal* approach to the resolution of structural conflict within Trinidad, thus taking us somewhere new. In doing so, I extend the duality of resolution processes earlier identified, taking quite a different line from previous researchers of the calypso art-form. Hence, this work unveils a third strand, adding new intellectual tools that offer an understanding of aspects of the calypso art-form, which show it as a *non-formal* approach to resolving conflict. In this view, the calypsonian functions as a *liminal-servant*, using in part a Trinidadian language, the vocabulary which reveals the various ideas encoded in the restricted terminology that is used to represent the daily challenges that some Trinidadians face.

It is important to understand that the ideologies discussed in this work reflect the Trinidad situation wherein there exist radical class inequalities. In turn, this generates clear forms of socio-political and/or economic conflict. Correspondingly, Lashley states that at times, government have attempted to exercise control over calypsonians and their attempts to offer comments on the prevailing issues. Lashley (1982, 1998, 2004) and Joseph (2000) argued that this control has been exercised through various Acts of Parliament. In turn, calypsonians contend that these Acts of Parliament manifest as censorship.

In using the term non-formal, I am therefore referring to a process wherein the calypso functions as a facilitator in a dialectic that is attempting to resolve contradictions or oppositions, as perceived by calypsonians, in either the socio-political or economic domains of Trinbago.

On the one hand, the matrix below sets out the personal, professional and process attributes of each of the three approaches to dispute resolution, while on the other hand it offers an opportunity to compare and evaluate the interrelationship between these attributes.

Functioning as a *liminal-servant*, the calypsonian has a sense of immediacy of purpose, offering the audience verbal symbols as part of an artistic rite that is a response to pathologically prevailing issues. In this non-formal process of managing conflicts, the audience becomes co-celebrants in their own learning as characterized by their committed participation and involvement in "the act," thereby creating for them, a truly deep, meaningful and edifying experience.

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6 *Inequality problematic*: In using this term I am referring to the calypsonians’ attempt to articulate the pertinent issues that arise from the *Matrix of Domination* (as it applies to the Trinidad situation), as they operationalize an approach that necessarily addresses the issues within this Matrix.
Figure 1: A Matrix of Comparative Personal and Professional Attributes of the Models of Dispute Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAL</th>
<th>INFORMAL</th>
<th>NON-FORMAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROCESS ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PROCESS ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PROCESS ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversarial Domination</td>
<td>Equalize Power</td>
<td>Integrative/Supportive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Creating Little Vortices of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Co-Operative</td>
<td>Learning,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessive Due Process</td>
<td>In The Shadow Of</td>
<td>Agit-Prop, Free Flowing Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>Of Liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Print</td>
<td>No Print</td>
<td>Conscious Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Artistry Of Linguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject To Multiple Sanctions</td>
<td>Few/No Sanctions</td>
<td>Censorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monopolistic</td>
<td>Free Trade</td>
<td>Laissez-Faire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Connected</td>
<td>NGO - Service</td>
<td>Mass Communication Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided</td>
<td>Oriented Musical Event Yielding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure Property</td>
<td>Protect Rights</td>
<td>Preserve Liberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PERSONAL ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PERSONAL ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer Dominated</td>
<td>Adroit Friend</td>
<td>Agent Of Consciousness,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liminal Servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piquant Observer &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commentator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>Fearless</td>
<td>Hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Dominated</td>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Audience Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Altruism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exorbitant, Horror Story</td>
<td>Inexpensive</td>
<td>Entrance Fee/Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROFESSION ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PROFESSION ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PROFESSION ORIENTED ATTRIBUTES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Flowing Structure</td>
<td>Flexible/Malleable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Ritual</td>
<td>Ritual Process</td>
<td>Ritual Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>Fairness &amp; Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavily Insured</td>
<td>Uninsured</td>
<td>Chancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening &amp; Inaccessible</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Empathic Sharing Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Averse</td>
<td>Risk Taking</td>
<td>Options, Possibility, Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure Driven</td>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>Success Anticipated</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This paper is based on a recognition of how, in relation to the events occurring within a calypso tent and/or the Dimanche Gras, the rules for this particular approach to dispute processes are negotiated, and simultaneously, social life within these venues is governed by normative repertoires that involve the manip-
ulation of the rules of performance by calypsonians, in order to bring about the audience’s increased consciousness. My approach builds on the work of other authors, such as: Benda-Beckmann et al. (1988) and Roberts (1979) who, lending their weight to an informal approach, argue that rules governing localized conflict behavior are not internally consistent codes of action analogous to Western written law, but can instead be negotiable, internally contradictory repertoires that are applied with discretion.

Hence, this approach to the anthropology of dispute resolution offers a cultural analysis that identifies how the local institution of the calypso tent and/or Dimanche Gras and its actors create meaning. It then identifies the impact of this meaning on the surrounding social relationships, and the effect of the cultural framework of the calypso venues on the nature of the processes of Conflict Transformation itself. In doing so, I recognize a clear parallel between this work and that of Comaroff and Roberts (1981, pp.18–19) who, in their work on dispute processes within Tswana society, examined the cultural logic of the localized dispute processes. Other authors like Schapera (1955) and Dikobe (2003) contend that there are striking similarities between calypso and Tswana songs of derision in which grievances are articulated. Bohannan (1957) also identifies the process of song disputes in which the Tiv of eastern Nigeria engage.

Weyer (1932) signposts us to another example of the application of the use of indigenous music in the process of expressing and resolving disputes in Eskimo culture. In one aspect of that culture known as the nith-song, parties in dispute engage in a process of vocal exchanges, during the course of which they take alternating turns to express their grievances against each other in song, while accompanied by an appropriate dance. This process resembles in part the Extempo calypso which is a well-established calypso art-form in Trinidad and Tobago.

In closing I can offer “Jack’s Question” by Daz as the final illustrative example of the process of which this article is the subject. This calypso refers to the former FIFA Vice President and Minister of State in the Trinidad and Tobago government. It was internationally recognized that Warner flouted the FIFA regulations as a consequence of which he subsequently resigned from his FIFA post. In singing to the audience, Daz adopts the colloquially common practice of dropping the pronunciation of the last letter of a word. So rather than singing “That Jack ask,” what is more significant is Daz’s distorted audible emphasis on the phrase which, to the audience, sounds more him voicing his displeasure with Warner as he sings with emphasis: “That Jack ass.”

Mr. Jack Warner, you resign from FIFA, why you stop there?
Your next move to save further embarrassment: leave the Parliament chair
Look P.M. Kamla forward your tape to the Attorney G
You say how the tape doctored, let me see how you will convince me?
The leader of COP said categorically: “Force Jack to step down and face the enquiry”
Where's the FIFA Tsunami? You resigned subsequently,
You cannot fool the P.M., AG or Rowley
His peculiar question: "If suspension was an option"
That Jack Ask [ass], That Jack Ask [ass],
Also if his FIFA pension could all go towards the Children Fund
That Jack Ask [ass], that Jack Ask [ass],
The P.M. still remain numb to all of Jack's question
Me, I couldn't help it ah laugh at the questions that Jack ask [ass]
That Jack Ask [ass]

Conclusion

I have based this work on the recognition that the subset of calypsos being considered are in themselves an art-form that reflects the pertinent issues experienced locally in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean region. These calypsos, offering commentary as they do on the occurring social, political and/or economic issues occurring within the country and the wider Caribbean region, demonstrate how the inter-relations of the social phenomena of the island bear on each other, as they manifest in the staged events of the calypso tent and/or the Calypso Monarch competition held during the Dimanche Gras show. I show the function of the calypsonian as a luminal servant urging and beckoning to a different understanding of the events occurring within the country. This non-formal facilitative process engages the principles of empowerment and recognition that are embedded in the well-recognized process of Conflict Transformation. In this way this article has brought a new strand to the prior duality of the formal and non-formal approaches to dispute resolution.

References


