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## ABSTRACT

This study explores traditional masquerade in Trinidad with a focus on Black Indian mas. It considers the threats to the survival of this artform, using the concepts of cultural death, cultural memory and photography as a medium of preservation. The study asks: What place does Black Indian Masquerade hold in Trinidad's cultural memory? Its objectives are to explore the practices, rituals and traditions associated with Black Indian Mas, to examine the role photography can play in recording Black Indian Mas and creating a visual memory, and to analyse efforts by state agencies to publicise and preserve Black Indian Mas. This cultural studies project draws on primary data from a practitioner of Black Indian Mas, a local photographer and staff at the National Carnival Commission or NCC. The major findings in this research are that, embedded in its various features, Black Indian Mas retains aspects of Trinidad's African and First Peoples' cultural heritage. However, there are threats to its survival such as: competitions, poor judging criteria and insufficient financial incentives. The study also finds that attempts made by the NCC, the state-sanctioned agency tasked with the preservation of traditional mas, are lacking in intensity and urgency to address the decline of this artform. Finally, this study also finds that photography is an invaluable instrument for preservation in its ability to archive and create a visual record of Black Indian Mas and thus, a vital component of Trinidad's national memory.

**Key Terms: Black Indian Mas, traditional mas, photography, cultural death, cultural preservation, memory.**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BIM</b>	Black Indian Mas
<b>NCC</b>	National Carnival Commission

## INTRODUCTION

During the early hours of Carnival Monday, the Mayor hands over the keys to the city to the Merry Monarch<sup>1</sup>. It is this act which signals the official start of Trinidad's Carnival. Carnival in Trinidad is a two-day event which precedes the Catholic season of Lent. While the official celebrations span Carnival Monday and Tuesday, a myriad of competitions would have already been concluded such as: Panorama, the Soca Chutney Monarch and the enthusiastically contested International Soca Monarch<sup>2</sup>. One must also note that the planning and preparation for Carnival takes months with a great deal of coordination and hard work. But what is Trinidad's Carnival? Is there any definition which can be deemed apt and sufficient? Philip Scher's (2002) response, when engaging with a definition of Trinidad Carnival, states that to do so is, "increasingly difficult" (461). Perhaps wrestling with a definition is an inadequate approach to understanding what carnival is, rather, one should look to carnival's significance to the people since, at its inception, it became, "a symbol of freedom for the broad mass of the population [...]" a deeply meaningful anniversary of deliverance from the most brutal form of human bondage." (Hill 1985, as cited in Liverpool 1988).

Carnival is a vehicle for expression via its three artistic artforms: calypso, steel pan and masquerade. Masquerade or mas<sup>3</sup> tradition started in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was carried over by the French plantocracy to Trinidad who brought with them their preferred diversions and entertainment. This included lavish masquerade balls, indicative of their wealth and privilege. Today, however, mas has diverged into two distinct groups, traditional mas and fancy or pretty

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<sup>1</sup> The Merry Monarch is the King of Carnival crowned at the Dimanche Gras competition on Carnival Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'soca' was coined by Ras Shorty I, who is also credited with the genre's invention which fuses East Indian music and calypso.

<sup>3</sup> Mas is the diminutive term which is used to reference both the traditional and contemporary forms of masquerade. For this study, the word masquerade will be referred to as mas.

mas' (Harris 114). According to Scher (2002) the younger generations are attracted to pretty mas and its participants number in the thousands, "dressed in ornamental bathing suits." (454). These bathing suits are adorned with beads leading to the subgenre of pretty mas termed 'bikini and beads' (Gugolati 102). Conversely, traditional mas is steeped in history and resistance and as such, the characters resonate with, "the desire to mock the upper class through ridiculous imitation" ('History of' par.3). Some of the characters of traditional mas are: the *Baby Doll*, *Bookman*, the *Burrokeet*, the *Pierrot Grenade*, the *Midnight Robber*, *Moko Jumbies*, *Dame Lorraine* and the *Black Indian*.

Daniel Crowley (1956) in *The Traditional Masques of Carnival*, catalogues the traditional masquerade characters such as the *Dame Lorraine* and the *Pissenlit*. Crowley (1956) identified *Rare and Extinct Bands* which indicates that these characters were endangered as early as the 1950s. Carol Martin (1998) also provides a catalogue of traditional carnival characters in *Trinidad Carnival Glossary*, and identifies characters such as the *Dragon*.

Errol Hill (1985) in *Traditional Figures in Carnival: Their Preservation, Development and Interpretation* also explores the range of traditional characters. Hill identified seventy traditional mas characters whereas Crowley had highlighted fifty. Hill (1985) proposed four paths towards preservation of traditional mas characters but he also acknowledged the transformation of some of these characters as part of their development. For him, these developments occurred organically and could not be controlled. Hill (1985) also stated that those charged with the organisation of the events in carnival should create a space for these traditional characters. In his essay, Hill (1985) also explores the use of traditional characters by playwrights as part of their interpretation and inclusion in the creative consciousness of the region. These written works by Hill (1985) and Crowley (1956) point to a risk of extinction and the need for the preservation of

traditional mas characters. The future of such characters also comes into question with the death of veteran traditional mas performers. The recent passing of Narrie Approo, who played Black Indian mas for many years, prompts concerns about the fate of this masquerade.

### **Black Indian Masquerade**

Black Indian Mas, or BIM,<sup>4</sup> is a traditional carnival mas inspired by the indigenous people and Africans. Dylan Kerrigan (2004) offers some insight into the history of BIM, “Black Indian mas, the fiercest of the traditional Indian masqueraders, may have its roots outside Trinidad. Some authorities like long-time Black Indian Narrie Approo, suggests this mas had its origins with runaway slaves taken in by Native Amerindian communities in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century” (“Creatures of” par. 10). There are several features of BIM which sets it apart from other Indian bands<sup>5</sup>. Black Indians paint their faces black and their costumes are largely black with huge, ornate headdresses featuring feathers and beads in the shape of a bird (Martin 221-22). BIM has a strict hierarchal structure and is also noted for its use of language, “derived from Aruacan, Yoruba and Creole” (“Creatures of” par. 10).

The most prolific of the BIM practitioners was Narrie Approo who served as King or *Okenaga* of the Black Indian tribe for decades. Upon his retirement in 2011, the title of *Okenaga* was handed to Anderson Patrick, who renamed the tribe *Warriors of the Huaracan*<sup>6</sup>. Approo was a master masman<sup>7</sup> whose life was dedicated to the cultural landscape of Trinidad. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Narrie Approo died at the age of 94, which brought to an end a life dedicated to mas which

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this research paper, Black Indian Mas has been abbreviated to BIM.

<sup>5</sup> The National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago or the NCCTT have identified five types of Indian bands: Black Indians, Blue Indians, Fancy Indians, Authentic Indians and Red Indians (also called Guarahoon and Wild Indians).

<sup>6</sup> In keeping the tradition of the Black Indian tribe, the new king or *okenaga* renames the tribe.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase refers to a man who performs in the mas every carnival.

started in 1934. Approu's repertoire of characters include: imp, bat, robber and dragon but he will be best remembered for BIM. What does his death mean for the future of BIM and by extension, traditional mas? While there are some websites, newspaper articles and passing references of BIM in scholarly works, there is no critical analysis in the literature which explores the role this historically rich tradition plays in acting as a reservoir for cultural memory.

The study will focus on one subset of traditional mas – BIM. While the research shows that Black Indian communities developed within the wider Caribbean<sup>8</sup>, this thesis will focus solely on BIM in Trinidad. This is because of its close link to the country's carnival celebrations. Additionally, while Trinidad is one half of a twin-island republic, Trinidad's cultural history and development uniquely shaped some aspects of its carnival which includes BIM, differentiating it from Tobago. The research focuses from 1934 to the present date. The year 1934 is significant as it was the year Approu began playing mas and it is his role and contribution to culture which form the bedrock of this research. The research focuses on individuals who are practitioners of BIM, local photographers as well a researcher and a member of the Registration and Adjudication Division from the National Carnival Commission Trinidad and Tobago or NCC<sup>9</sup>. These individuals have been chosen for their expertise and experience in documenting and publicising BIM traditions.

### **Research Question**

This study is guided by the question: What place does Black Indian Masquerade hold in Trinidad's cultural memory?

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<sup>8</sup> This is the case in Belize, Honduras and Nicaragua because of the Garifuna or the Black Caribs of St. Vincent. Their expulsion from the island by the British in 1797, led to their settlement in these countries.

<sup>9</sup> The NCC is the abbreviated form of the National Carnival Commission Trinidad and Tobago and will be used as such in this study.

## **Thesis Statement**

The study argues that while Black Indian Mas is being practiced, and work by photographers help us record and remember this mas, not enough is being done to enhance its visibility and secure its place in the cultural and collective memory of local audiences.

## **Objectives**

The study's objectives are to:

1. Explore the practices, rituals and traditions associated with BIM and demonstrate their link to aspects of Trinidad's cultural memory;
2. Examine the role photography can play in recording BIM and creating a visual memory of the mas; and
3. Analyse efforts by state agencies, such as the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, to publicise and preserve BIM.

## **Methodology**

This thesis is a cultural studies project. The research methodologies fall within the qualitative paradigm. The data collected will constitute both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will include an interview with a living BIM practitioner, staff at the National Carnival Commission, as well as local photographers. This data will be supported by secondary data sources such as: journals, books, newspaper articles as well as other cultural studies theses.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The thesis will cover three conceptual areas which will create the framework for the study. Those concepts are: cultural memory, cultural death and photography as a mechanism for cultural preservation.

### ***Cultural Memory***

Veysel Apaydin's (2020) essay, *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage*, is used as a source for considering cultural or collective memory. He differentiates between collective memory and individual memory. For Apaydin (2020), there exists a relationship between culture and cultural memory. However, he also postulates a bottom-up perspective in that, changes in culture, whether it is reconstructive or destructive in nature, must be acknowledged by the communities themselves. Communities must actively participate in those processes which impact aspects of their heritage and ultimately, the collective memory of the society. Within his argument, Apaydin (2020) also posits the notion that cultural memory is integral, not only to acknowledge the past, but also to secure the future.

### ***Cultural Death***

Culture is a critical conceptual area for this research paper. One famous definition of the term culture is, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits by man as a member of society." (Taylor 1874, as cited by Gusfield 2006). Culture thus becomes a practiced phenomenon however, it can be threatened. David Lempert's (2017) *The Logic of Cultural Suicide and Application to Contemporary Global Strategies: Drawing from Models in Psychology and Biology*, explores the

concept of cultural suicide. Lempert (2017) argues that there are features in individual and genetic suicide which are echoed in cultural suicide. He goes on to argue that this can then explain why some questionable and dangerous decisions are made with regards to culture. He refers to this as ‘irrational behaviors’ (17), since evidence is readily available espousing the dangers which society blatantly disregards. Lempert (2017) demonstrates his theory with the use of a chart, see Figure 1:

Classification of Cultural Death	Definition		Possible Logic	
	Type of Death	Agency of Death	Speculated Mechanisms	Speculated Categories
Natural Cultural Extinction	Natural	Environment or Natural Process	Natural Disaster or Climate Change; Lack of Foresight/Planning	Annihilation; Adaptation
Genocide	Unnatural	Competing Culture	War, Hegemony	Annihilation, Enslavement, Assimilation, Adaptation to New Role?
Cultural Suicide	Unnatural	Own Culture as Participatory Agency	War (Mutual destruction?); Competition; Environmental Depletion	Annihilation, Assimilation?, Adaptation to New Role?

**Figure 1**  
**Image of the different classifications of Cultural Death**  
**Source; Research Gate, Ref David Lempert, May 2017**

***Photography as a Medium of Preservation***

Alan Trachtenberg’s (2008) *Through a Glass, Darkly: Photography and Cultural Memory* functions as the conceptual context for photography as preservation. In his paper, Trachtenberg (2008) posits the concept that photography serves as a repository for memory. Additionally, he explores the common ground being shared between the photographer and the historian. For

Trachtenberg (2008), photographs have the potential to link disparate temporalities since a photograph's past contains its future.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter One focuses on the practice, rituals and traditions associated with BIM. In this first chapter, there will be an exploration of key aspects of BIM which are rich in cultural memory and the challenges facing the artform by a living practitioner of BIM. Chapter Two explores the optics through which the research is being done - cultural death and preservation. In this second chapter, the role of photography as a method of preservation will be explored through a local photographer. Chapter Three is a critical analysis of the efforts made by state agencies such as the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, in preserving traditional mas and BIM.

## CHAPTER ONE

*I told you that our Trinidad Blacks particularly those in Carenage, are ex-slaves or sons of ex-slaves. Following Emancipation, which occurred on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1898, they resolve to celebrate each year this day, a solemn festival for perpetual memory.*

- *Father Bertrand Cothonay, Dominican Friar, circa 1880*

Atop a hill, surrounded by trees, Anderson Patrick, the current Okenaga of the Black Indian tribe, welcomes me into his home in Petit Curacaye, Santa Cruz. He is both warm and charismatic as he sits down for an interview for this study (see appendix A), gesturing me to sit with the words, “My home is yours.” Patrick is Chief Wadagaraja, the current *Okenaga*<sup>10</sup> or leader of the Black Indian Tribe, having ascended in 2011 upon the retirement of Narrie Approo. Significantly, Patrick is a living practitioner of the BIM whose insight reveals the role BIM plays as a reservoir of cultural memory in Trinidad, but also some of the challenges he and his tribe face in their struggle to keep BIM alive.

Nestled against an *Orisha* shrine, Patrick contemplates what being Black Indian means to him. His first grievance is with the word ‘character’, “our Carnival people, which is the NCC, they just leave it as we are characters...it has more than just being a character. I am not a character.” Patrick explains that being Black Indian is spiritual, “long ago in Trinidad, you had different yards that come out with Black Indian. But the colours you play was the colours on the shrine itself...based on the deity I belong to, I pay homage to that deity.” Black Indian is a living link to the *Orisha* presence in our island which dates back centuries.

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<sup>10</sup> *Okenaga* refers to the King of the Black Indian Tribe.

Also, to describe these cultural ambassadors as *characters* is to diminish their historical value as figures of resistance and rebellion. Patrick elucidates on Black Indian's history which is the comingling of Africans and the Kalinagos, "Black Indian is a people in which the African man come to the Americas. Some of them were able to escape and went into the forest area...and interbreed with what you call Amerindians, but these Amerindians were the Caribs, and they had children". The Africans would run away from the oppression of the colonizers and the First Peoples would shelter and conceal them –both acts resonate with defiance and this is celebrated in Black Indian Mas as Cupid postulates:

[t]he Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is not only the parade that the books say it is. There is more to it. It is a medium for psychological release...for affirmation of deep religious like commitment...a stress reliever. Historically, Trinidad Carnival with its principal components - mas, calypso and steelband- has been a paramount crucible of resistance. (qtd. in Stegassy 102).

The costumes of the Black Indians hold the history and memory of the nation. They are predominantly black with highlights of other colours such as gold, blue, white, yellow and red and, "they appear in the 17<sup>th</sup> century style Spanish pantaloons made of broad yellow and black stripes" (Martin 164). Martin (1998) goes on to say that the costumes imitate the attire of the Spanish at the time of the conquest, "their pants are short breeches, not unlike Spanish pumpkin hose of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with black and red strips of fabric sewn in vertical stripes. The shirt or jerkin had puffy capped sleeves, and the pants can also have diagonally striped flanges." (5). In a tone of defiance, Patrick reveals the significance of their costumes as it becomes a symbol of protest, "we mock the Spanish, because the Spanish is who do us a lot of things...So, on Carnival day, we have on the conquistador's clothes," see Figure 2:



**Figure 2**  
***Warriors of Huaracan\_Flying Agitan: Ifa Moloko***  
**Source; Abigail Hadeed, used with permission, 2019**

Additionally, the costumes resonate with elements of our ancestral past, “Beads date back to Antiquity in Africa [...] Cowrie shells and mirrors represent eyes that allow the masked spirits to see in different directions simultaneously.” (Liverpool 35). Crucially, the costuming of the Black Indians also provide a link with the indigenous people of Trinidad which is discussed by Bellour and Kinser (1998), “[o]ther beads are given curved forms by means of wire which crosses their faces and dangles in large hoops from the nose and ears. In the 1950s they wore wigs of hemp rope” (164). This connection with the First Peoples is one of the reasons which drew photographer Maria Nunes to capture images of traditional mas, something she revealed in an interview for this study (see appendix B), “And there are aspects of the traditional First Peoples’ heritage in the costume...that mas holds, for me, a lot of history and it’s the only mas really left in our Carnival that specifically honours the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.” It is therefore imperative that this tradition is maintained as it is a link to our indigenous peoples.

One of the more distinctive qualities of Black Indian mas is its language. The language is rich in cultural memory as it, “evolved from traditional Amerindian and African languages,

Spanish, English, French and even Hindi.” (‘What is’ par.1). Patrick speaks of this memory being embedded in the songs, “The calypsonians say they tell a story. The parranderos and them say they tell a story. Black Indian, Red Indian also tell a story. So, if you want to know the whole history about us, the story is told in our songs and in our language.” The language of the Black Indians reverberates with the memory of the First Peoples, slavery, conquest, indenture and resistance. Patrick goes on to explain that before they go on the streets, the Black Indians say prayers in their unique language, further emphasising the spiritual dimension of BIM. Their language also reinforces the strict, military hierarchy they follow. Using the phrase *eenay eenay*, the *Okenaga* is called first, followed by the *Malerao*<sup>11</sup>, then the *Agitana*<sup>12</sup>. Once called, they would answer with the phrase *Zimbodiyaa* (which Patrick makes me recite) to signal their readiness. For the Black Indians, the language reflects their lineage, “When they ask who is Black Indian? I will respond with *Amina Sanja*, meaning I am Black Indian.” Patrick goes on to sing in the language:

*Amina Sanja*  
*African daajah*  
*Yoruba Congo*  
*Dakenangenah droopah*  
*Tageeba raado*  
*Haep meenme cango*  
*Aaj ro bak bak wadi bak nehi*  
*Deban dabi wayi nebu*  
*Creebo creebo*  
*Rakway jagwaday*

However, he laments that a non-practiced language dies, “But what does happen, like anything else, if you know a language and you go in a next place and that language ain’t talking at all, it

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<sup>11</sup> *Malerao* refers to the Queen of the band.

<sup>12</sup> The Flying Agitan or *Agitana* is the second in command after the Okenaga/King.

does go out from there,”. If BIM is allowed to further decline in Trinidad, we will lose a critical linguistic component of our national memory.

Despite the rich tapestry of culture that is BIM, Patrick delves into some of the challenges he faces as a living practitioner of this artform. When asked whether or not he sees any loss of cultural traditions in our Carnival, Patrick highlights the disappearance of the mas camps and the emerging presence of showrooms, “[y]ou will hardly see a mas camp. Long ago when you walk on Charlotte Street, you see a lot of mas camps, actual people employed and doing the work and thing. Now, they send their designs and China mass producing it.” Black Indians would spend months creating their costumes, the final product a labour of love and commitment. In an interview with Austin Fido, master masman Narrie Approo had a robust response to the suggestion that some of his work was farmed out, “I have been playing mas since 1934. You think I need someone to help me?” (“What is” par.1). These mas camps are not only cultural beacons, they also function on a socio-economic level, “[b]ut one of the functions of Trinidad Carnival is to sustain the smaller, local communities. At least in Port-of-Spain what happens in the mas camps, steel band yards, and the calypso tents, is that formation and maintenance of tight-knit communities.” (Schechner 5).

Patrick also considers the competition and the judging criteria as working against not only BIM, but traditional mas as a whole, “because the judges don’t know how to judge you...they don’t know what criteria to look for, so what they do? They put everybody under authentic Indian.” On 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2023, Claire Woods, a researcher for the NCC, sat down for an interview for this study (see appendix C) and reinforced Patrick’s concern, “[b]ut how are these judges to know what is traditional or not traditional? Who is training them?” A self-

proclaimed 'purist', Woods emphasises that ignoring things such as the lack of authenticity in a character's shoes will, 'help kill it.'

Patrick also states that one of the issues facing BIM is one of recognition by the relevant authorities which is reflected in the poor monetary incentives being offered to practitioners of traditional mas, "one year I come first as an individual and I get \$1500. The band came first, the band get \$1500,". He goes on to say that Black Indians do not have big bands, they have 'mini bands' and regardless of the small prize money, as band leaders, they have an obligation to make provisions for their practitioners as Patrick states, "All traditional mas is all inclusive. So the band leaders have to provide food, drinks and costume." Nunes also echoes the need for increased financial aid for traditional mas, "I would like to see there is a system of grants, annual grants, in Carnival for the practitioners of the traditional aspects of Carnival that they could apply for and that would allow them to create things that they have the capacity and imagination to do, but they don't have the resources." These financial pressures have an impact on BIM and as Patrick explains, their ability to increase their membership.

Patrick proposes some measures which can be implemented to promote awareness and appreciation of BIM. He is of the view that Carnival and traditional mas needs to be promoted on a larger scale and throughout the year, "Not when Carnival done, and Ash Wednesday, the whole place gone dormant, they take up everything and the place dead again for the next year". He is also advocating for a museum, "[t]his is one of our objectives, you see this area...we want to have a museum... For now you seeing Black Indian in Carnival but in the future? When you all come here, right where you are now, will be the home or the house of BIM." His words echo eerily as one preparing for one's own death which is what will be BIM's fate if state agencies and the public continue to sit idly by as these carnival traditions die.

## CHAPTER TWO

*"Time, memory, and identity are abstract concepts. But preservation is very concrete and material based."*

- *Inaki Bergera and Jorge Ortero-Pailos*

Scher (2002) in *Copyright Heritage: Preservation, Carnival and the State in Trinidad*, captures the current predicament of traditional mas characters in Trinidad, "[y]ou hardly see a Bear in Port-of-Spain anymore. The Blue Devils have mostly left the streets. And the Guarahoons (Native American warriors) are in short supply too. You have to really search for Bats and Clowns and Midnight Robbers" (454). Traditional mas characters are being played less and less in Trinidad's carnival, a reckoning which Earl Lovelace laments in his masterpiece, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The main character, Aldrick Prospect, mourns the wave of pretty mas sweeping through the island and eliminating the traditional carnival characters in its path, "[s]uddenly, they were all gone, outlawed from the city or just died, gone, and he felt alone [...]. It would be lost now among [...] fantasy presentations that were steadily entering Carnival; drowned amidst the satins and the beads and the rhinestones." (Lovelace 121).

The decline in traditional mas performance has been explored in the literature. For Harris (1998), this annihilation of the traditional mas characters can be attributed to the treatment of Carnival as a commercial enterprise (9). Harris (1998) goes on to state that this exploitation of culture, "is part of the postmodern phenomenon of intellectual property which assigns an economic value to the creation," (9). Carnival is no longer resistance and rebellion but rather,

spectacle and an avenue for income generation. Thus, pretty mas became a means to attract thousands of tourists at Carnival time and add to the ‘almighty’ GDP<sup>13</sup>.

In acknowledging that the threat to traditional mas is real, efforts must be made to preserve, protect and foster it. This effort cannot be halfheartedly given but should reflect the urgency needed as many of the individuals who acted as stalwarts in their respective fields are dying such as, Narrie Approu. BIM by its very traditions holds many aspects of our cultural memory. Its very history speaks to two groups heinously treated by the greed and cruelty of colonialism – the indigenous peoples and Africans - and BIM emerged from a comingling of their traditions and practices. Therefore, preserving BIM is integral in securing our collective memory. The action needed for this cannot solely be a top-down approach, there must be active participation from the communities themselves to engage in the processes of cultural preservation (Apaydin 13). This active participation is essential since cultural memory is integral for the future, “[t]hrough both heritage and memory are accumulated through time, they are also shaped and developed in the present, which in turn gives direction to the future.” (Apaydin 16).

Errol Hill (1985) in his essay, *Traditional Figures in Carnival: Their Preservation, Development and Interpretation*, proposed four avenues to preserve and develop traditional mas characters: in the literature; a portfolio which contains pictures drawn by a local artist versed in the traditional mas; someone to create tangible items such as carnival dolls to complement the drawings in the portfolio and a carnival museum (16). In suggesting a portfolio of drawings, Hill brings attention to the potential work of images in preserving mas. Photography, for the past three decades, has done yeoman’s service for BIM. Abigail Hadeed stands out for her commitment to photographing traditional mas and especially, BIM. While Hill did not identify

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<sup>13</sup> This is the Gross domestic product (GDP) of a country. It measures the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country.

photography, it is a valid and valuable mechanism for cultural preservation and ultimately, our collective memory:

The power of photographs as cultural memory, the memory of events or persons we could not have experienced firsthand except through photographs derived from ingrained belief that every photograph portrays at least the raw material of memory, shows what memory is. Thus, it assumes that, whatever else it shows by way of composition and design each photograph cannot help but show a residue of something that once existed before a lens. *By reflection alone photographs produce memory.* (Trachtenberg 124-125, emphasis added)



**Figure 3**  
**Image of the Warriors of Huaracan near the Queen’s Park Savannah entitled *The Guardian***  
**Source; Abigail Hadeed, used with permission, 2019**

Hadeed is a Trinidadian artist and photographer. Her work is an interrogation of the issues facing the wider Caribbean. Hadeed stated that she has long been fascinated with the *Orisha* faith and this led her to photographing BIM, “[m]y photographic narrative attempts to chronicle the lives of the people who keep the traditional mas alive through their dedication and struggle.”

(‘Black Indians’ par. 1). In 2021, Cornell University Dark Laboratory awarded Hadeed’s *Warriors of Huaracan* first prize in photography.

Hadeed has been photographing BIM for thirty years which has uniquely positioned her to make meaningful connections with practitioners of this craft including, Narrie Approo. Hadeed’s work displays her longtime engagement with portraiture, a technique she maintained with BIM. When asked about this in the interview for this paper (see appendix D), Hadeed indicated that it was important to create a space for these BIM practitioners which allows their craft to be highlighted and celebrated, “I thought to myself, ‘Wow, Carnival is so massive, all these traditional mas characters just got lost’.” Hadeed’s work gives visibility to BIM which would otherwise get lost in the sea of bikini and beads. Her decision to do the vast majority in black and white is also deliberate, “I want you to stay focused on the subject.’

On her website, *Abigail Images*, she has captioned each of her photographs. She has stated that the captions are just as important as the images since they serve as marks of identification. To do otherwise is to dismiss the subject since uncaptioned photographs, “seem like a mote floating in space, unmoored and unattached.” (Trachtenberg 122). All these deliberate choices lend themselves to reinforcing the identity of BIM and pays homage to their practice.



**Figure 4**  
**Image of Burton Sankeralli in a photograph entitled *Jeepetok***  
**Source; Abigail Hadeed, used with permission, 2019**

For Hadeed, photography is vital as a preservation tool for our cultural heritage. She posited two reasons. The first is the inefficiency of our current system as, “we already have a very poor history of archiving our stuff, and looking after everything of importance.” She goes on to demonstrate her point by identifying one of the custodians of our history, the newspapers, “keeps no records, they dump everything as fast as they burn through a hard drive, they dump it and write over it again, so they ain’t keeping archives.” Archives are integral for storing aspects of our history and an improper system means that vital elements can be lost. Hadeed has thirty years of our history by virtue of her negatives and images thus emphasizing photography as an affirmative preservation method. Secondly, Hadeed believes that agency for our own history and culture must be placed in our own hands, “if we don’t take care of our own heritage, why should somebody else?” Additionally, Hadeed believes that we must act as our own lens and see

ourselves through, “our own perspective”. This act of claiming our cultural independence is not a new argument. When considered with Errol Hill’s (1985) view, Hadeed’s calls for agency becomes even more urgent, as he believes that the final step to gaining our full independence lies in our cultural independence, “[n]ow that most of the Caribbean territories have become independent, it is as if the last obstacle to achieving a true Caribbean is a cultural one.” (Hill 28).

Hadeed’s work places her on the front line where BIM fights for survival. As such, she has seen the many challenges these masqueraders face. One of the problems she has witnessed is their financial constraints. Many of these practitioners, according to Hadeed, are self-employed and are subject to an unstable income. This poses challenges in creating their mas, “[t]hey get nothing and it costs them money to build their mas, they have no sponsorship.” Yet, millions are spent on conventional bands and their promotion. If we do not invest properly in these culturally rich practitioners, their disappearance would leave Trinidad’s heritage impoverished. For Hadeed, Approo’s death has hastened this decline. Approo knew the language and while Hadeed says that she has recorded him, his death has been a linguistic loss, “[t]he Indians have a specific dance and a specific language [...] the actual parts that go with the mas, has been lost”.



**Figure 5**  
***Narrie Approo* in Victoria Square, Port-of-Spain**  
**Source; Abigail Hadeed, used with permission, 2009**

Hadeed herself has been subject to yearly struggles to photograph BIM. Her work is self-funded and she is not the recipient of any grants. On one occasion, she recalls having to pay eight thousand dollars for a press pass, yet Hadeed marches on, committed to documenting our culture. She has been on the receiving end of verbal and physical abuse which she shared, “I paid for and rented a car park in Victoria Square to photograph my characters and this man came and physically abused me and told me I don’t have any right to do (photography).” By actively preventing a party whose photography not only records images of great cultural value, but also serve as documentation for historical archives, we are displaying what Lempert (2017) described as ‘irrational behaviors’ (17) as we are effectively participating in our own cultural death.

## CHAPTER THREE

*I have instituted the Carnival Development Committee to bring all the calypsonians into the fold.*

*The word is development, don't forget, development.*

- Dr. Eric Williams

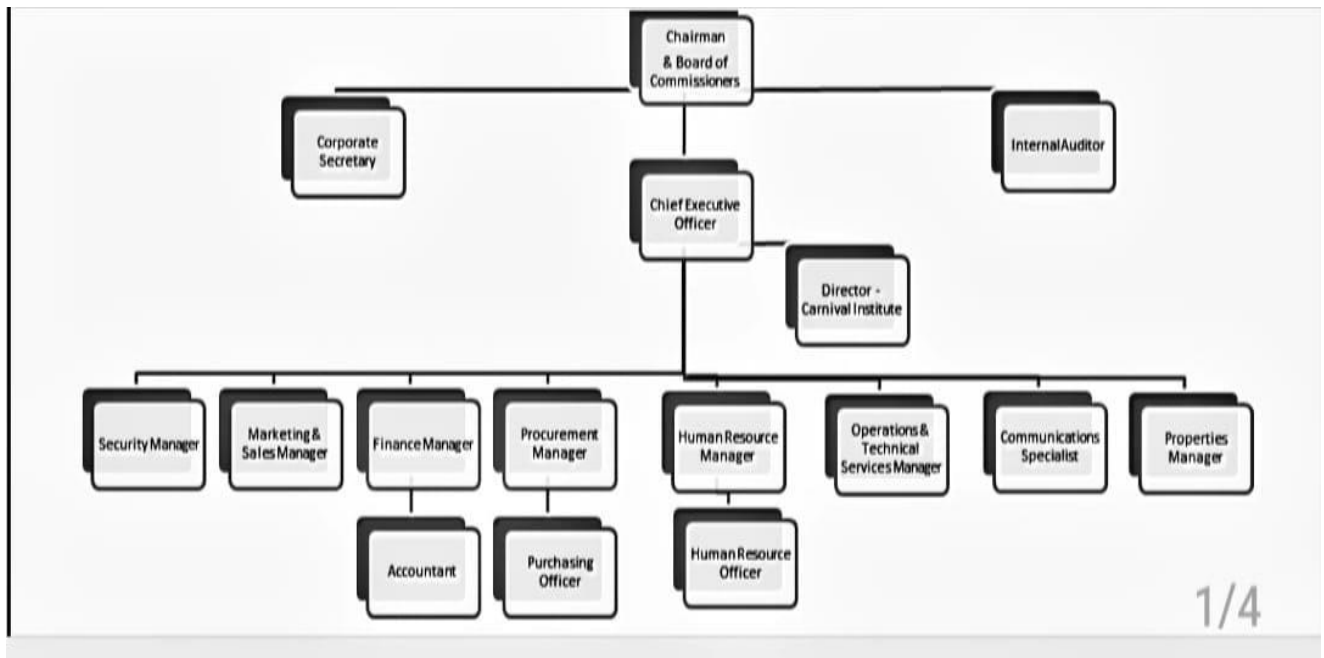
For some, Carnival celebrations allow them to counter the crippling impact of hegemonic forces on our island. For others, Carnival offers an opportunity to subvert the stereotypes and burdens associated with class, gender and economic status. However, for the government or state in Trinidad, Carnival served a dual purpose from the 1950s onwards. It was used as a symbol of nationalism and later on, an item in the state's economic portfolio, as the once vulgar Carnival, made up of those below the diameter<sup>14</sup>, "became, during the movement for independence in the 1950's, a demonstration of the 'genius of the people'. In the early 1950's, it became a potential growth market and profitable enterprise." (Scher 19).

Therefore, in 1956, when limited home rule was granted to Trinidad, the newly elected Premier, Eric Williams, and his People's National Movement (PNM) party, seeing the potential for Carnival as a rallying point, "took administrative control of the Carnival from a variety of private groups and created the Carnival Development Commission (CDC)" (Green 5). Then, in 1986, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), reorganized the CDC and created the National Carnival Commission (NCC)" (Green and Scher 81). The NCC was reorganized by an Act of Parliament – The National Carnival Commission Act of 1991, and, "confers upon the NCC the power, authority, and responsibility to regulate and coordinate all Carnival activities;" (Green and Scher 19). Under the Act, the NCC is a semi-autonomous entity as it can fundraise,

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<sup>14</sup> This refers to a line of respectability in the society or the underworld. Those below the diameter were of a particular class in the community such as stickfighters and prostitutes.

enter into contracts and partnerships without having the approval, beforehand, of Parliament (Green and Scher). The NCC exerts a great deal of control over Trinidad’s Carnival and the evidence of this is, “as obvious as a Google search: type in “Trinidad Carnival” and the searcher is linked immediately to a number of government sponsored sites.” (Edmondson 133). The NCC is headed by a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman, Board of Commissioners, as well as a Chief Executive Officer, see Figure 6 below:



**Figure 6**  
**Chart representing the leadership structure of NCC**  
**Source; the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**  
**THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, CHAP. 22:02, 2013**

Within the NCC, there are divisions or committees such as Regional, Accreditation, Research, Registration and Adjudication, to name a few. It is the objective of this study to consider the role played by state agencies in the promotion and preservation of BIM. The NCC is the body which

has been tasked with the responsibility to preserve, protect and promote Carnival in Trinidad as echoed in the objectives<sup>15</sup> of the Commission:

- i. To make Carnival a viable, national, cultural and commercial enterprise;
- ii. To provide the necessary managerial and organizational infrastructure for the efficient and effective preservation and marketing of the cultural products of Carnival; and
- iii. To establish arrangements for ongoing research, the preservation and permanent display of the annual accumulation of Carnival products created each year by the craftsmen, musicians and designers of Carnival.

Consequently, this study casts a critical eye on the activities of the NCC and its fulfilment of these objectives and as such, consideration must be given to the NCC's organization of events, the allocation of prize monies and the activities centered on preservation of traditional mas. To investigate, the author of this paper interviewed the head of the NCC's Registration and Adjudication division, Mrs. Shurla Wilson-Belfon, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (see appendix E).

The first area of investigation was the number of competitions traditional mas, and by extension BIM, are a part of, as it speaks to the presence and visibility of traditional mas in the carnival celebrations. The competitions and its related categories along with the prize monies are represented in Figure 7:

Traditional Mas Competitions		
	Competition	Time Frame
1.	Traditional Carnival Characters parade	Carnival Friday 12 Noon
2.	Senior Parade of Bands (Mini)	Carnival Monday

<sup>15</sup> The National Carnival Commission Act of 1991 outlines the objectives of the National Carnival Commission.

<b>Adjudicated Categories and Prize Money</b>			
<b>Category</b>		<b>Prize Money</b>	
1.	Traditional Individual of the year	1 <sup>st</sup> place	\$10, 000
		2 <sup>nd</sup> place	\$ 8, 000
		3 <sup>rd</sup> place	\$ 6, 000
2.	Traditional Costume of the year	1 <sup>st</sup> place	\$ 5, 000
		2 <sup>nd</sup> place	\$ 4, 500
		3 <sup>rd</sup> place	\$ 4, 000
3.	Mini Band of the year	1 <sup>st</sup> place	\$ 2, 250
		2 <sup>nd</sup> place	\$ 1, 800
		3 <sup>rd</sup> place	\$ 1 ,600
<b>Appearance Fee</b>			
1.	Appearance Fee at Adam Smith Square	\$ 800 appearance fee	

**Figure 7**  
**Breakdown of Competitions and Prize Monies for Traditional Mas, 2023**

<b>Conventional Mas (Pretty Mas) Prize Monies</b>			
<b>Category</b>		<b>Prize Money</b>	
1.	Traditional Individual of the year	1 <sup>st</sup> place	\$16, 000
		2 <sup>nd</sup> place	\$14, 000
		3 <sup>rd</sup> place	\$12, 000
		4 <sup>th</sup> place	\$10,000
		5 <sup>th</sup> place	\$9, 000

**Figure 8**  
**Breakdown of Prize Monies for Individual for Conventional Mas, 2023**

Figure 7 represents the earning potential for traditional mas during the Carnival period as discussed in the interview with Mrs. Wilson-Belfon. When one considers the expense associated with creating a costume, both as an individual and a band, the prize money is simply not sufficient, a point postulated by Green and Scher (2007), “[d]espite the government’s frequent pronouncements that the Carnival represents the ‘genius of the people of Trinidad,’ funds to support the arts are insufficient.” (76) This lack of funding will directly impact the preservation of traditional mas as it will not be able to attract membership with such meagre incentives as noted by Patrick, “if we membership getting an incentive, it would be stronger.” It is useful to note that, as a state-controlled agency, the NCC is indeed a recipient of funding from the government which, “went from (TT) \$12 million in 1999 to (TT) \$314, 135, 369 million in 2018” (Ramcharitar 3). When one considers the sizeable allocations for Carnival via the NCC, the prize monies offered is insufficient and will indeed contribute to the decline of BIM.

Liverpool (2007) stated that, “governments and state agencies that are entrusted with the development of Carnival must also develop cultural policies that are profoundly sensitive to and inspired by Carnival itself.” (8). The preservation of traditional characters of Carnival has been one of the aims of the Commission. Mrs. Wilson-Belfon identified several programmes the NCC has implemented to save traditional mas characters. These areas are: education and workshops; work of the Regional Carnival Committees and research. According to Wilson-Belfon, the Commission works closely with 57 Regional Committees located throughout Trinidad. The work of the committees keeps Carnival alive within the communities themselves. Wilson-Belfon states that, “the NCC will grant these Regional Committees subventions which would allow them to hold events.” Furthermore, Wilson-Belfon identified that these traditional character players, “are family-oriented mas, it is handed on generation after generation,” and by maintaining close links

with the 57 regional committees, the NCC hopes to keep some of the traditional mas characters alive.

Additionally, the NCC has workshops which target children with the hope that the younger generations will learn about traditional mas as Wilson-Belfon explains that:

through the regional Carnival they also have workshops in schools that try to maintain and educate the younger ones of the traditions of Carnival, the characters themselves. And on Carnival Friday, you will see what we call a graduation (of children), where they parade on the road at... The Traditional Carnival Characters Parade. The children from the workshops showcase what they have learnt.

In the interview for this paper, Woods, in her capacity as researcher at NCC, also provided some insight into the methods being used by the NCC for cultural preservation of those artforms. She stated the Research Division tries to access and store data on traditional mas through the various genres since, “research could have many layers to it. There is the books, the photographs, there’s films, the interviews we have conducted.” This research acts as a reservoir which can provide valuable information for generations to come. Ms. Woods provided an example about someone who wanted to enquire about a Midnight Robber costume, “he’d been playing Robber for years and he wanted to bring back a specific type of costume and asked, ‘How would I go about making that?’ and I remember having to sit down and try to deconstruct what they used to wear in the olden days.”

When listed and explored, all of the methods employed by the NCC seem impressive. However, traditional mas is endangered, a point noted by the 2013 report on the NCC, “The dominance of fantasy mas or bikini and beads is for some a source of worry, since the tendency is towards sameness and the perpetuation of somewhat generic image of masquerade. It also means that over time, older masquerade traditions may be lost.” (Ferdinand 6). Additionally, when questioned about the registration numbers for BIM, Mrs. Wilson-Belfon stated, “it has

been the same. We only have one group which is Anderson's from Santa Cruz." BIM has dwindled down to just one group whose numbers range from 11-50 and are thus, categorized as a mini-band. In fact, registration numbers for traditional mas, "is over 100 because of the 17 categories for the characters" (Wilson-Belfon). Registration for pretty mas or conventional mas<sup>16</sup> is in the thousands (Scher 2002). Clearly, there is a disparity. What can account for the decline? Has the NCC abdicated its role?

At the heart of the problem is competition. Formally judged competitions can be traced back to at least 1900 (Dudley 2009). Built into these competitions are constraints which serve interests other than the preservation of traditional mas, a point noted by Dudley, "the trend towards increasingly elaborate spectacles and formally adjudicated competitions since the 1950s as proof that Carnival has come to serve the interests of an elite minority. Cultural nationalists or wealthy businesses trying to control an authentic expression of the people." (12). Carnival was borne out of defiance, it is an expression of the people's spirit, but formally judged competitions implemented restrictions in the hope of stifling certain components of the mas. According to Woods, the quality of judging is also doing its part in the decline of traditional mas, "[t]hey come up and they barely know how to say a word but the costume pretty, it catching the judges' eye and next thing you hear, that person win best costume. What happening to you who still trying to keep the tradition alive?"

The NCC, while charged with preserving and promoting Carnival, has proven to be unreliable with records and lacks transparency. In doing this paper, this author has found it quite difficult to access information, statistics and documentation on BIM from the state sanctioned keeper of Carnival – the NCC. The erratic data collection is noted by Ramcharitar (2020),

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<sup>16</sup> The NCC refers to pretty mas or bikini and beads bands as conventional bands.

“[f]urther proof of the unreliability of Carnival financial data was provided by a 2013 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Joint Select Committee, which examined the National Carnival Commission’s activities. It noted no audits and accounting documents, disbursement of large amounts of cash, no tender contracts, and cost overruns.” (11). Accountability and transparency are integral for the successful running of any institution and are quite significant in ensuring public trust. Traditional mas is an important vessel of national memory and the state agency tasked with the important work of protecting it needs to produce quality documentation, which is both reliable and honest, to ensure its survival.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to investigate the practices, rituals and traditions associated with BIM and assess the role played by photography in recording and archiving this artform and its ability to forge a visual memory. The study cast a critical eye on the efforts made by the NCC with regards to the promotion and preservation of BIM. To that end, interviews with a living Black Indian practitioner and a researcher from the NCC were conducted. The interviews revealed that features such as the history of Black Indians, their language and costumes retain elements of Trinidad's African ancestry. Additionally, BIM forms a link with one of the more overlooked aspects of our ancestral past – the First Peoples. Critically, the study reinforces that BIM also contains elements of resistance.

Through these interviews, threats to the survival of BIM were discovered. One of the main challenges facing BIM is competition. The quality of the judging in the various competitions is an issue. Poor judging has the capacity to demotivate these practitioners, hastening its decline since, it may forsake genuine, traditional mas representations, in favour of flashy, but inaccurate, costume depictions. Also, the interviews done for the study also exposed the lack of adequate financing. Traditional mas is poorly represented in the prize money offered by the NCC. This ultimately, negatively affects, their ability to attract new members. Additionally, Black Indians are given a small appearance fee when they are asked to turn out to an event and merely act as token reminders of traditional mas.

The NCC has a great deal of control over carnival celebrations in Trinidad and as such, they act as the main line of defense against the decline of BIM. One of their objectives is the preservation and conservation of traditional mas forms and in that vein, the NCC has identified and pursued several avenues to achieve this goal: education, workshops through the Regional

Committees and research. While there exists some attempt, it is simply not enough. In a veritable tsunami of bead studded bikinis and ‘pretty mas’, the NCC must infuse more urgency into their current efforts to save BIM. Furthermore, if the NCC faithfully adheres to its own objectives, it can fulfill its mandate to conserve and preserve traditional mas and by extension, BIM.

One area currently working assiduously towards preservation and awareness is photography. Photography acts as means to archive traditional mas and in doing so, the story of Trinidad’s carnival. Photography brings to the public, images of BIM and in so doing, helps publicise this artform. Furthermore, photography allows us to act as our own lens and to see ourselves through our own perspective. This offers us enhanced agency with regards to telling our own story. Being in the trenches, these photographers capture the images but also the struggles. Photographers note the lack of recognition BIM receives as reflected in the meagre prize monies and the absence of grants. Photographers also face challenges as well, such as the ridiculously exorbitant fees NCC demands for a press pass during Carnival. In this regard, one can see where the state sanctioned institution contributes to our own cultural death.

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## APPENDIX A

Interview **excerpts** with Anderson Patrick (AP), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 at Petit Curacaye.

**MR: How did Black Indian Mas arrive in Trinidad and Tobago?**

**AP:** African people were never considered human, right. Whatever the colonial masters considered them, they were subjects and property. But they fought under these conditions. Black Indian is a people in which the African man come to the Americas. Some of them were able to escape and went into the forest area...and interbreed with what you call Amerindians, but these Amerindians were the Caribs, and they had children. The language is between both parents. You might figure is the male escape, but sometimes the female escape too.

**MR: What does it mean to you to be Black Indian?**

**AP:** It spiritual. Long ago in Trinidad, you had different yards that come out with Black Indian. But the colours you play was the colours on the shrine itself...based on the deity I belong to, I pay homage to that deity. Long time...you find a lot of...I remember...in my case...our people were more yellow. You had other people in Cascade, they were more like a blueish...people in Carenage was a different colour – red – and so they play in all different colours, based on the head deity of the shrine. Our Carnival people, which is the NCC, they just leave it as we are characters...it has more than just being a character. I am not a character.

**MR: Can you tell to me about the Black Indian Mas costuming?**

AP: When Carnival came about, everybody start to come out with their creativity...but what we kept...we kept the clothes, the Spaniards clothes. So the Spaniard, based on whether you is a good slave, they give you their throw off. You know about the house slaves and the field slaves, right? He throw off was nice for he but it was not nice for us so we redecorate his clothes by using beads and so on. We here based on the hate we have for the Spanish, we mock the Spanish, because the Spanish is who do us a lot of things...So, on Carnival day, we have on the conquistador's clothes...we are noted for corbeau feathers...our feathers are the corbeau feathers...at the side and in the hair and even self we have wings, the Flying Agitan have wings of corbeau feathers.

MR: **Is it hard to get corbeau feathers and what about expense for things like beads?**

AP: Let me explain something...corbeau feathers always hard to get, right? Right now I want some. What happen, for we, the corbeau is a sacred bird to us, very sacred. The feathers could last for over 30 years, but the rest of feathers don't last as long and they cannot take we decoration, like paint. We stripe it in different colours. This is how I will say this, "The land make the man and not the man make the land". We have turkey, guinea bird and corbeau. Long ago, before it had Samaroo's, people do their own thing, use what it have. We also use horns and each one of those things carry ranks, authority. Long ago, if you play with horn, it mean you carry certain ranks and you go be confronted by a next Indian. They will ask you to talk and if you can't talk, then they go literally beat you. The Agitan or the King, would use some sort of whip and cut yuh tail. So this is how serious it was long time. But now (he shrugs), you understand...it doesn't matter what you do because the judges don't know how to judge you...they don't know what criteria to look for, so what they do? They put everybody under authentic Indians. But an Indian is an

Indian, all of us authentic. But what we have...those of us who authentic to the land and those who authentic otherwise.

**MR: Black Indian has a specific language, can you talk about the language?**

AP: (laughing) Oh, you ready to get down to that? I want to tell you something. The calypsonians say they tell a story. The parranderos and them say they tell a story. Black Indian, Red Indian also tell a story. So, if you want to know the whole history about us, the story is told in our songs and in our language. Long ago, they use to have...see how we having this conversation here? That's how it was in Black Indian. But what does happen, like anything else, if you know a language and you go in a next place and that language ain't talking at all, it does go out from there, you understand? So in one of our songs, when we move out into the streets, we move with the king and the Queen, we do we prayers...we have prayers and thing to do before...I wouldn't give you the prayers cause it ain't making sense now. This song will tell you a lot about the gathering of everybody in the tribe. The first call we does call the king, then the queen, Malerao, sometimes they use a trumpet or a bugle, but we call is a kind of war call. The call is 'eenay, eenay?'. So they answer, they go bawl, "zimbodiyaa'. So let we call the queen, "Malearo, eenay, eenay?" she go answer, "zimbodiyaa'. Let me give you a part of the language:

Amina Sanja  
 African daajah  
 Yoruba Congo  
 Dakenangenah droopah  
 Tageeba raado  
 Haep meenme cango  
 Aaj ro bak bak wadi bak nehi  
 Deban dabi wayi nebu  
 Creebo creebo

Rakway jagwaday

So this is now telling you who is me: When they ask who is Black Indian, I will respond with 'Amina Sanja,' meaning I am Black Indian.

**MR: What challenges does Black Indian Mas face?**

AP: Well, I wouldn't say Black Indian Mas, but I will say traditional mas. Our failure first, one of our failure is being recognised properly. Second is the know-how. You go see different carnivals around the world. And this is where I would say conventional mas does get their wealth. They going outside and because of the network that they have and the interaction that they have, they could go out there. This is like Peter Minshall and Brian McFarlane had, they didn't depend on Trinidad Carnival. They could afford to forget the NCC and throw their own thing in the Complex. One of the things about traditional mas is it small, is very small in numbers...if you looking at traditional mas bands, we don't have no mega-band, we don't have no large band, we don't even have small band, we have mini-bands. Groups and individuals. All traditional mas is all inclusive. So the band leaders have to provide food, drinks and costume. One year I come first as an individual and I get \$1500. The band came first, the band get \$1500. What I was asking them is simple this: Not when Carnival done, and Ash Wednesday, the whole place gone dormant, they take up everything and the place dead again for the next year. You look like a place like the Savannah, right? And if you check the different traditional mas that we have. You can have us in different cubicles...and we could have four or five dollies for this particular character...I don't like the word character... for this representation. You bringing in the tourists and you asking us to bring out at least at least 6 Black Indians. We could interact...so we membership, cause we membership getting an incentive, it would be stronger.

**MR: Do you see changes in Carnival?**

AP: You will hardly see a mas camp. Long ago when you walk on Charlotte Street, you see a lot of mas camps, actual people employed and doing the work and thing. Now, they send their designs and China mass producing it. So all that change, you know?

**MR: What does the future hold for Black Indian Mas?**

AP: This is one of our objectives, you see this area...we want to have a museum... For now you seeing Black Indian in Carnival but in the future? When you all come here, right where you are now, will be the home or the house of BIM. So this is the future, the legacy, as they say, should I pass on. What we throwing in it? We throwing in the land. The land and the skills and the know-how. We will the center where we will have like, an education center, where we will show films.

## APPENDIX B

Interview **excerpts** with Maria Nunes (MN), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 via WhatsApp (recording).

**MR: What drew you to photographing Black Indian Mas?**

MN: I find traditional mas as a whole, there is so much story to it. Each one has a history, a story. And the people who play that, all the different types of traditional mas, are living out those traditions, are telling those stories. I find its more visually appealing than most of what is happening in design in mas as a whole in Trinidad and Tobago. I think we have...we are going through a period where there is a lack of design and creativity, for me. There a lot of the same. Mind you, there are a lot of people who would look at traditional mas and say well we see the same thing every year too. But I do find the aspect of a Bookman's head, a papier-mâché head, a work of art. It's interesting, it's unique. So for me the most compelling thing about traditional mas is that word tradition. It's something handed down generation after generation. Very often you find families where there is a tradition of playing mas. You see grandmother, mother, and daughter playing the mas. And then there is the history. Our Carnival tells a lot of our history. One thing that attracted me to Black Indian Mas is how the tradition evolved, drawing on the First Peoples' Heritage. It holds a lot of history in it. It's mocking the Spanish. And there are aspects of the traditional First Peoples' heritage in the costume...that mas holds, for me, a lot of history and it's the only mas really left in our Carnival that specifically honours the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago and that is sort of overlooked.

**MR: Your places you in the trenches, you see the struggles of the Black Indian tribe.**

**What actions would you like to see implemented which can ensure the survival of these cultural traditions?**

MN: Well, I think they need to review competitions. Let's say 20 or 30 or 40 thousand dollars...to show...value. If you started to really value what people have to do keep these traditions going, you know? I think you will start to see more work. I think that. The way traditional mas is handled and managed within Carnival needs to be completely rethought. I would like to see there is a system of grants, annual grants, in Carnival for the practitioners of the traditional aspects of Carnival that they could apply for and that would allow them to create things that they have the capacity and imagination to do, but they don't have the resources.

## APPENDIX C

Interview **excerpts** with Ms. Claire Woods (CW), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023 at the Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago.

Interview **excerpts** with Ms. Claire Woods (CW), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023 at the Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago.

**MR: You interviewed Narrie Approo a few years ago. Can you give me some insight into that experience?**

CW: So I had just gotten to the Carnival Institute and he would have been one of the first traditional mas I would have done an interview with, was myself and another researcher. We went up to his home and interviewed him there. So, at the time, I didn't know much about Black Indian, I had seen maybe one or two performances. But you know is not one of those masquerades you see a lot of. You might just see one group that he would have belonged to. I think we have a bio of him, I was the person who did up the proposal as to why he should be given the national award.

**MR: Would you share it?**

CW: Yes, if I could find it (laughs).

**MR: Tell me about your section here, research.**

CW: On our side, we are research. Now research could have many layers to it. There is the books, the photographs, there's films, the interviews we have conducted. There's music.

**MR: As a researcher here at the Institute, what aspects of national memory do you see embedded in Black Indian Mas traditions?**

CW: The people Narrie would have come into contact with, that would have trained him, they would have passed on certain African traditions. And a lot of what is practiced in traditional mas, not all, there are areas of secrecy. But clearly, there was a passing down of African traditions. This African retention is seen in the materials that they used, some of the beliefs that they have, and the language. And clearly there is an affinity with the First Peoples. Not the North American Indians but the Amerindians of our region, because they are the first people who would have occupied our space here. Not only that, in history, you would have read that there would be slaves who ran away and the First Peoples would have taken them in and taught them certain things, so it is like a marriage of the two.

**MR: What has your research revealed with regards to costuming of the Black Indians?**

CW: So Black Indians, black is often times a prominent colour in the costume, you would notice that as well. But there may be another colour. What do these colours mean? What do they represent? Now, I remember when one of the members, maybe a high ranking member in the same band passed away. I think Anderson told me they wore purple as a mark of respect. I've seen yellow, yellow and black, I've seen purple and black, I've seen green and black. The feathers are important as well. Did Anderson tell you about how they would trap the feathers?

**MR: He said he always wants feathers and that corbeau feathers last, but no specific story.**

CW: Well, let me tell you that one. I think it might have been Narrie who told me this. So they would find some dead animal, a dead dog or something, and then use that as a kind of

lure for the corbeau. They would then snag the bird and get the feathers. That would have taken a lot of work to get that done. But in the past, they had no problem taking the length of time to make these bits of their costume.

**MR: What accounts for the changes in Carnival?**

CW: There was a period in Carnival called *Jamette Mas* and the people were appalled saying it was lewd, it's immoral...BAN IT! Outright ban it...and so they started to impose certain restrictions on the mas hoping to stifle certain things. But you know what the most successful thing in all? Not I am going to ban drums and impose 1000 rules...no. The most successful tool to stifle was competition. The minute you start to offer prize monies and competition into the mas, it changes the whole flavour of the mas. People said they going into the competition, but once you do, you had to adhere to the rules of that competition.

**MR: Ms. Woods, what does the NCC have in place for the preservation and conservation of traditional mas?**

CW: So there are workshops that are in place. Practitioners would come in and pass the knowledge to whether it's children because we have a children's parade on a Friday. But there's a but. Alyuh must do alyuh research. Research is what's going to make you or break you. If that thing not looking like the thing, then you've got a problem. I remember one of the traditional mas players, now deceased, he'd been playing Robber for years and he wanted to bring back a specific type of costume and asked, 'How would I go about making that?' and I remember having to sit down and try to deconstruct what they used to wear in the olden days.

**MR: Are any factors contributing to the decline of traditional mas?**

CW: So you have competitions, but not only that. The passing down of knowledge is another problem. When Narrie died, he had someone that he was passing the baton to which is Anderson. So Anderson would have grown up under his tutelage. But what happens when the masquerader dies and there is no handing down of knowledge? Because you may not be a band, you may be a solitary figure like a Midnight Robber. Is just you, you're 90 something, about to go, how you passing on that information? There is information about the speech, there's information about materials, how to construct a proper costume. Once you die, that goes with you and there are tons of examples.

Let's look at judging. So you have this competition and you have these judges. But how are these judges to know what is traditional or not traditional? Who is training them? There is a criteria for judging, and how you are being trained to judge. What are you looking for to tell that Black Indian costume lacking something? Are you looking at how pretty it is? Well, this one had a lot of glitter...glitter...glitter...it so shiny. But when you look on the feet you seeing NIKE. They come up and they barely know how to say a word but the costume pretty, it catching the judges' eye and next thing you hear, that person win best costume. What happening to you who still trying to keep the tradition alive? That too will help to kill it.

## APPENDIX D

Interview **excerpts** with Abigail Hadeed (AH), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 via Zoom.

**MR: What drew you to photograph Black Indian Mas?**

AH: First of all, I have been drawn to traditional mas and steelband in general. And the reason for that is our mas came out of resistance and rebellion against colonialism...When I came to Trinidad in 1984, my first Carnival was 1985 and I started photography from then. I was like...these are really cool...I was never interested in the big mas. I got interested in the Orisha. Because the Orisha and the Black Indian are closely related...things just led on to each other as opposed to being deliberate. It's always instinctive. So something would have led me to the Orisha because a lot of traditional mas is also versed in African and Indian traditions. They're hidden in the mas.

**MR: You have had a long term engagement with portraiture. This is evident in your images of Black Indian mas practitioners. Why was it important for you to capture these practitioners in this way?**

AH: Well I believe portraits are a window to the soul. When you look at an individual, when you really look at somebody, you make a connection and that's what I try to do when I make images. Doesn't matter if it's a person or an object. I think everything has an energy or there's an essence. So for me, a portrait is even more important when it comes to the traditional. I was very influenced by a photographer called Irving Penn. Irving Penn, back in the 60s was travelling through Africa and he was carrying around a little tent and he would use the inside of the tent as a backdrop to do portraits of the African

people he met out there and I thought to myself, ‘Wow, Carnival is so massive, all these traditional mas characters just got lost,’ you don’t really see them unless you go to Traditional Mas on a Carnival Monday, Tuesday. You’ll be lucky to see a traditional character unless you following them around.

**MR: Black and white photographs are also used. Can you comment on this choice as it relates to Black Indian Mas?**

AH: So when I started photography, I did all my processing in black and white. With black and white I had the most control because I could develop the film the way I wanted. I could print the photographs the way I wanted. So I had the ultimate control. The reason for that it takes away from the distractions. Colour, I find, could be very distracting so you don’t focus. And so, the border around my film, even though I have carried it through to the digital realm, I don’t crop my images so I would shoot my images and compose everything in the camera. I very rarely crop an image. I rather compose in the camera rather than the computer or the darkroom. So black and white, more or less, because I want you to stay focused on the subject and I have control.

**MR: We are clearly not doing enough to create and sustain a space for traditional mas. Your artistry places you in the trenches, so to speak, what changes, actions you would like to see to ensure the survival of these cultural traditions?**

AH: Stop the competition. People are driven by money, even the traditional mas, at times, are driven by money so they don’t play mas anymore. They go from stage to stage to perform to get money. But if they playing mas and jumping up on the street, they really enjoying themselves, and where they reach and they not studying to cross the stage and win a

competition. They get nothing! They get nothing and it costs them money to build their mas, they have no sponsorship. I mean, I don't even know that is a solution like why do we have beads and feathers? Because the more money that was thrown at them the more easily to throw more beads and feathers on a costume. You see Carnival came out of a reason and the reason was, "Up yours!" to the colonials. It was about rebellion. It was about we don't want to be oppressed anymore. It wasn't a competition, so creativity was infinite, they were mocking the aristocrat, and the more they enjoyed the mocking the master, the nicer, the more interesting the costume became.

**MR: My research is being done through the optics of cultural death and preservation. What role can photography play in preserving these carnival traditions?**

AH: Well, two reasons, we already have a very poor history of archiving our stuff, and looking after everything of importance. A visit to the museum alone will indicate its depravity. They have done, I mean, up until 5 or 10 years ago, our archives were in an utter disaster. It still isn't great but if we don't take care of our own heritage, why should somebody else? We don't have an extensive history post-colonialism for two reasons. One, what it cost me to archive and to photograph Carnival every year and what I have experienced is just downright nastiness. Now is 30 something years I have been doing this, so I have been through every iteration of the Carnival Commission you could possibly think of. They made sure we didn't have an accurate record of ourselves. Because they overcharged you, they overprice you. I have paid \$8000.00 for a press pass. I have had members, if it was, NCC or NCBC or whatever the hell they call themselves physically abuse me. I paid for and rented a car park in Victoria Square to photograph my characters and this man came and physically abused me and told me I don't have any

right to do (photography). They were the reason we don't have accurate records of ourselves. The newspapers keeps no records, they dump everything as fast as they burn through a hard drive, and they dump it and write over it again so they ain't keeping archives.

**MR: Should we be alarmed or hopeful with the passing of the baton for the impending future of Black Indian mas and traditions? Is there hope?**

AH: No, I think when Andy throws in the towel, I think that's it for Black Indian Mas. You might see one here and there. But in terms of the dance, the Indians have a specific dance. The language, the knowledge, all of it, the actual parts that go with the mas has been lost. Andy and Moloko really pull that tribe.

## APPENDIX E

Interview **excerpts** with Mrs. Shurla Wilson-Belfon (SW-B), conducted by Mahase Ronnie Ramdass (MR) on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 at the Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago.

**MR:** How many competitions are there for Traditional Mas?

**SW-B:** In traditional mas, you have a total of 17 categories, of course Black Indian being one of them. For Carnival, there is a Traditional Individual Competition which takes place on the Friday before Carnival where all the traditional categories are played. And then on Carnival Tuesday, there's a competition called Individual of the Year for Traditional Mas male and female. Those are the two main competitions for Carnival. There is also the bands. When you do bands in seniors, it has a section called Traditional Old Time Carnival as a band for Carnival. And of course, you know, they are judged overall in costume design which will be a reflection of their traditional mas.

**MR: Over the years, has the registration for Black Indian increased or decreased?**

**SW-B:** Traditional mas, I always say, lives because the registration for traditional mas is over 100 because of the 17 categories for the characters. You have somebody entering into it. In the last...2020 to now, and even before 2020, we saw some of the mas trying to come back. So you would find that this year we had somebody playing Cow.

**MR: What is the NCC's position on Traditional Mas?**

**SW-B:** The NCC's position is of course, for the preservation and the conservation of the traditions of Carnival, that's the major objective of the Regional Carnival. Once we follow that mandate with Regional Carnival, which is the preservation and the

conservation of traditional mas throughout Trinidad and Tobago. There are 57 regional bodies.

**MR: Regional?**

SW-B: Yes, regional bodies, we have them all throughout Trinidad. We have one in Toco, one in central. We have 52 within our country, regional bodies who try to keep Carnival alive within that community. And through Regional Carnival Committees they are given funding. The NCC will grant these Regional Committees subventions which would allow them to hold events. There is the Jab-Jab, right down in central, Ronald Alfred and them. They are family-oriented mas, it is handed on generation after generation. And through Regional Carnival they also have workshops in the schools that try to maintain and educate the younger ones of the traditions of Carnival, the characters themselves. And on Carnival Friday, you will see what we call a graduation (of children) where they parade on the road at... The Traditional Carnival Characters Parade. The children from the workshops showcase what they have learnt.

**MR: So we do have some things in place?**

SW-B: We have things in place. We have workshops. And then, of course, we have, even within the communities the person who do the mas. You find that they try to keep it going. They themselves may have the little workshops. You find that there are persons, outside the regional bodies, who try to teach the children. You have the Moko Jumbie, Junior Bisnath.

**MR: Has the registration for Black Indian Mas declined or increased over the years?**

SW-B: Registration for Black Indian Mas, it has been the same. We only have one group which is Anderson's from Santa Cruz. He tries to bring as many persons as possible which is the *Warriors of Huaracan*, that's the name of the band. Besides bringing individuals, he does bring a band. His is a mini-band which is about 11-50 people. So, registration for that, I can tell you is the same people.

**MR: Any youths?**

SW-B: No, it's the same people.

**MR: What are the prize monies for traditional mas?**

SW-B: Prize monies...it's not plenty. First place gets \$2250; second place gets \$1800 and third place \$1600. That is all we pay 1-3 in categories. The other prize monies that will come under traditional, you will get traditional costume design 1st place \$ 5,000; 2nd place \$4500 and 3rd place \$4, 000. We have something new that we came up in 2020 which was Individual of the Year. We separated the traditional from the conventional. Individual of the Year, 1-3, 1<sup>st</sup> place was \$10,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> place \$8000 and 3<sup>rd</sup> place \$6000. For the conventional mas...

**MR: Conventional?**

SW-B: That's the pretty mas. Is nothing...far from traditional mas. Prize monies on the whole needs to be looked at. Conventional Individual of the Year 1<sup>st</sup> place is 1<sup>st</sup> place \$16,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> place \$14,000; 3<sup>rd</sup> place \$12,000; 4<sup>th</sup> place 10,000 and 5<sup>th</sup> place \$9,000. So you would see where the traditional mas you will get up to third place and the conventional you would get up to fifth place. We trying to even the field on that.