



The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
Caribbean Studies Project
HUMN 3099

Student name: JORDON BRIGGS _____
Student ID no.: 816010572 _____
Degree Program: BA VISUAL ARTS (SPECIAL) _____
Supervisor: DR MARSHA PEARCE _____

Title of Thesis:

Rituals of Moko Jumbie mas making and performance: An ethnographic study in
Trinidad 2019 – 2020

Declaration

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.
3. I consent to have my attached thesis used in any publication comprising Caribbean Studies Projects by The University of the West Indies. I understand that I will receive no compensation. I hereby assign publishing rights for the contribution to The University of the West Indies, including all copyrights.

Signature of Student: _____

Date: May 7th 2020 _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
The Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies

INDIVIDUAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This declaration is being made in accordance with the University Regulations on Plagiarism (First Degrees, Diplomas and Certificate) and should be attached to all work submitted by a student to be assessed as part of or/the entire requirement of the course, other than work submitted in an invigilated examination.

Statement

1. I have read the Plagiarism Regulations as set out in the Faculty Handbook and University websites related to the submission of coursework for assessment.
2. I declare that I understand that plagiarism is the use of another's work pretending that it is one's own and that it is a serious academic offence for which the University may impose severe penalties.
3. I declare that the submitted work indicated below is my own work, except where duly acknowledged and referenced.
4. I also declare that this paper has not been previously submitted for credit either in its entirety or in part within the UWI or elsewhere.
5. I understand that I may be required to submit the work in electronic form and accept that the University may check the originality of the work using a computer-based plagiarism detection service.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT –

COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

STUDENT ID -

By signing this declaration, you are confirming that the work you are submitting is original and does not contain any plagiarised material.

I confirm that this assignment is my own work, and that the work of other persons has been fully acknowledged.

SIGNATURE - 

DATE – May 7th 2020_____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My appreciation to:

1000Mokos

Alan Vaughn

Catherine Chang Kit

Joanne Briggs

Kirston Chen

Maria Nunes

Marsha Pearce

Moko Somokow

Nicolin Harris

Shaun Rambaran

Veynu Seiwrattan

Xevran Ivarra

without whom this research would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

The tradition of the Moko Jumbies in the Trinidad Carnival landscape has become a growing community effort as it strives to become more prevalent in contemporary mas.

This ethnographic research on two Moko Jumbie groups, 1000Mokos and Moko Somokow, highlights the ritualistic and performative aspects of the Moko Jumbies in the present context.

This work shows evidence of adaptability and growth of the spiritual character as it continues to maintain the traditions of its past while it makes strides to embrace its role as a staple in Carnival culture. 1000Mokos and Moko Somokow have demonstrated that the Moko Jumbies' presence is more than an amusement but part of an artform that make you look up and wonder.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
LIST OF APPENDICES	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE - LITERATURE REVIEW	4
CHAPTER TWO	10
CHAPTER THREE	20
CHAPTER FOUR	29
CONCLUSION.....	39
WORKS CITED.....	40
APPENDIX A.....	a
APPENDIX B.....	A

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1, page 12
Figure 2, page 12
Figure 3, page 15
Figure 4, page 16
Figure 5, page 18
Figure 6, page 23
Figure 7, page 26
Figure 8, page 27
Figure 9, page 30
Figure 10, page 31
Figure 11, page 33
Figure 12, page 34
Figure 13, page 38

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Description of Moko Jumbie tricks

Appendix B: Interview questions

INTRODUCTION

Rationale:

After observing the rising trends of Moko Jumbies in Trinidad, I believe it is important that an ethnographic study should be done on the traditional Carnival character. On the backdrop of a seeming decline in interest of many traditional mas' characters, the Moko Jumbie is seeing a rise in attention, highlighting the tradition of Carnival past, and uplifting the Carnival present. Hence, the Moko Jumbie deserves to be documented. For the study, the Carnival band Moko Somokow and the group known for teaching people how to become Moko Jumbies, 1000Mokos will be used because of their ease of access and how well they are known within the Moko Jumbie community.

This deserves documentation as not much has been written about the Moko Jumbie as it relates to preparation and presentation in the midst of the Carnival revelry.

Parameters:

This study is limited to its main source of observing and interacting with the group 1000Mokos and the Carnival band Moko Somokow.

Thesis Statement:

There is a rise in popularity in the portrayal of the Moko Jumbie. Although its presence has always been acknowledged in the mas', within recent times, the people who portray them demonstrate that Moko Jumbies are more than walking on stilts. They present rituals, art, creativity, and performance in their portrayals.

Research Question:

How have the ritualistic and performative aspects of the Moko Jumbie performance been integrated in the Trinidad Carnival of the present?

Objectives:

The aim of the study is to create an ethnographic documentation Moko Jumbies in Trinidad from 2019 – 2020

Methodology:

The research method consists of two activities:

First person observation: I participate, observe, and record the activity surrounding the Moko Jumbies

Third person interviews: Persons associated with the respective groups Moko Somokow and 1000 Mokos would be able to contribute information on the rise of Moko Jumbies. These two groups were chosen for study due to their popular appearance and connections with other Moko Jumbie bands. Interviews were conducted with key players - Kirston Chen, Veynu Siewrattan and Alan Vaughn. In addition, other participants of the bands were interviewed and contributed to the balance of this research.

Chapter Outline:

This study consists of four chapters. Chapter One the Literature Review. Chapter Two intends to examine the groups before and the lead up towards Carnival 2020. Chapter Three aims at examining and studying the groups during the Carnival season. Chapter Four will be dedicated to Carnival Tuesday 2020 and the aftermath of Carnival.

CHAPTER 1 (LIT REVIEW): WALKING TALL IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT

During the 15th century the Transatlantic trade sought the transportation and the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean. The Europeans kept the Africans divided by ensuring no one person speaking the same language was kept in the same space. They also kept the Africans away from anything that connected them to their homeland, outlawing anything related to it and punishment was given if any African defied such decrees. Despite these attempts to stifle the African identity, the enslaved did not relinquish their culture and customs. Their various forms of song, dance, and praise were used as forms of resistance.

These forms can be found in the Trinidad Carnival. Among the various portrayals during carnival are the traditional mas' characters. Some of these characters were generated with reference to stories from their homes in Africa, while others were generated as mockery towards their enslavers. Traditional mas' characters such as Jab Molassie, Blue Devils, Midnight Robbers, Dame Lorraines and Moko Jumbies have evolved from this African tradition.

The Moko Jumbie, which is the focus of this thesis, is a character well-known in the Trinidad mas' culture. It is more distinguished than the other characters because of their performance on tall stilts. Because of their height they are visible at any point and always draw someone's attention at Carnival events, including the parade on Carnival Monday and Tuesday.

Earl Lovelace pinpoints the origin of the Moko Jumbie:

For the origins of the Moko Jumbie we go to Guinea, Africa, where the Moko Jumbie is known by the name Nyomo Kwouya, (kwouya: the long) a mask symbolising the ancestral spirit that overlooks the community, seeing beyond the present space and time,

providing a sense of history and vision of the future... It is also prominent in Yorubaland, Toma, and Senegal, where it carries out the same function of protecting the community, spying out its enemies and seeing over the heads of the ordinary folk to what lies ahead...The name Moko Jumbie combines two words well known in Trinidad, although African, and subjected to ridicule and fear as were all things African. “Moko” is diviner in the Kongo language, and “jumbie” is a spirit or ghost; but here the word Moko is also used to refer to a vengeful African god. Notice the saying: “the vengeance of Moko will fall on you.” So Moko Jumbie may also mean “The spirit of the god Moko.” (Lovelace, 2004)

The Moko Jumbie with its clear African lineage, is connected to the spiritual practices of Orisha and Vodou. The history of these faiths can also be traced back to Yoruba, Africa:

“While most of the Ketu-Yoruba who were captured by the Dahomeans ended up in Haiti and Brazil, most of the Oyo-Yoruba captives ended up in Cuba, Brazil, and Trinidad, thus leading to the preponderance of the Yoruba world view in those territories.” (Aiyejina and Gibbons, 1999).

Springer, 1999, also notes the Yoruba has the strongest point of reference in the New World of traditions. But she pinpoints that Yoruba’s sister religion Orisha is spirituality present in mas’. Springer’s discourse makes the link between the Orisha faith and its rituals that hold root in the performance of the Moko Jumbie:

Our ancestors are near to us, waiting to be propitiated, hovering in protection and in punishment. Sometimes we invite them to come amongst us, in the sanaka, in the private propitiation, in our dreams and visions. We mask our visions and become them.

Sometimes they walk amongst us - ancestral spirits disguised in the mask of the leopard; or, tall atop the city, the Moko Jumbie, ancestor worship transported in the Carnival, transported wholesale. The Moko Jumbie not a clown; not merely a stilt dancer or walker but a revered ancestral spirit. An Egungun, a serious man, not to be played without prayer, preparation and ritual. (Springer, 1999)

Due to the syncretising of cultural forms in the Caribbean, Euro-Christian beliefs co-mingled with African worldviews. This impact can be observed also in Vodou practices.

“Even today, those who follow Haitian rituals are more likely to describe themselves as “serving the spirits” than as Vodouizan. Although the term Vodou suggest a religion that is distinct from others, many of Vodou’s hundreds of loa or “mysteries” are closely identified with specific Catholic saints, and attendance at Mass is often part of serving the spirits.” (Ramsey, 2011).

The Moko Jumbie has made its connections with vodou through representation of certain loas or gods being portrayed and becoming common in its mas. The portrayal of loa and references of Haitian carnival and tradition are starting to surface in the Trinidad, presumably through increasing Haitian diasporas and the Moko Jumbie participation in its representation, landscape and is likely to continue to grow in the coming years.

Until recently, the Moko Jumbie did not have much detail in design or costuming except for the signature stilts, basic clothing or body paint. The presentation started changing when mas designers Alan Vaughan and Peter Minshall respectively worked on the costuming and design of the Moko Jumbies. One of the earlier instances of this can be seen with Vaughn’s costume ‘The Crow.’ This recent development depicts an advancement that was not foreseen by Lovelace at the time when he said:

“The Moko Jumbie is the character that has changed the least. Despite its towering elegance and unthreatening visage, the Moko Jumbie has perhaps been too tall, too aloof, too awkward a figure to be embraced by the Carnival and, until recently, has persisted on the periphery of Carnival.” (Lovelace, 2004)

Veynu Seiwrattan, the band leader of Moko Somokow (formerly Touch D Sky), contests to the growth and development of the Moko Jumbie. He said he has witnessed the rise in the character’s popularity and believes this interest has to do with more intricate and stunning designs produced. Also, he said, it has to do with photography. Seiwrattan credits the fact that the visuals produced through photography and easy accessibility to the via social media and books have contributed greatly to the attention Moko Jumbies are receiving. Photographers like Kevin Browne, Maria Nunes, Stefan Falke have contributed largely to this exposure.

However, despite the popularity, Siewrattan said persons who wish to have Moko Jumbies at their events are not willing to pay the price for their presence because it does not seem a traditional character warrants great monetary value. On the other hand, because of his band’s designs, the demand for Moko Somokow’s appearance is slowly increasing. In addition, through their presence at events, there seems to be a growing appreciation for the value of Moko Jumbies.

“Almost any public event in Trinidad — from Government ceremonies to corporate promotions to tourist shows — now has at least a couple of Moko Jumbies,” Siewrattan said. “During Carnival, they join every competition and every parade. In the past decade, creativity in costuming and growing acrobatic skill have led to more and more enthusiasm from the public.”

An example of this was November 25, 2019 at Movie Towne Port of Spain when the cinema celebrated its 15th anniversary. The company had three Moko Jumbies present dressed in colours of the Trinidad flag waving flags, dancing to the music being played and serving as mascots for the day.

Interest and enthusiasm are further reflected by the subscription to the 1000 Mokos classes, hosted by designer Kriston Chen, and are held in Woodbrook, Port of Spain.

“Since early 2017, they have met every Sunday at the Alice Yard Arts Space in Woodbrook, west Port of Spain. Free classes strive to get students up and comfortable on sticks, progressing to increasing heights as they leave the yard and walk through the streets to practice in local parks,” (Funk 2018). Chen said 1000 Mokos started with him and a group of friends wanting to learn to be moko jumbies and coming to Alice Yard one day and teaching each other. He described it as a learning process and people seeing them and being interested in what they were doing. Chen said they made the decision to make it a community project and they would keep it running as long as persons came.

Ironically, while Moko Jumbies are gaining recognition in Trinidad, founder of the Kaisoca School of the Arts, Junior Bisnath is looking for more global recognition by setting his eyes on a new milestone through the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

The *Guinness Book of World Records* includes several stilt-walkers’ exploits. In June 2009, a total of 1,908 participants got on stilts across the globe, from the US and Canada to Brazil, Russia, and Macau, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Cirque du Soleil. And in 2011, 957 primary students in the Netherlands broke the record for most stilt-walkers to walk one hundred metres together.

On September 10, 2017, the Kaisoca team assembled over five hundred Moko Jumbies, including a small contingent from Grenada, at Skinner Park in San Fernando. Although it was not enough to break the existing record, Bisnath is determined to make this an annual event, and at the same time break the record.

Based on these initial findings, the awareness of the Moko Jumbies in the Trinidad landscape has increased. There seems to be a more welcoming participation in the performance of the character, which also connects with the Trinidad identity.

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING THE JUMBIE

Sticks in De Yard:

This study started by contacting both Veynu Seiwrattan (band leader of Moko Somokow) and Kirston Chen (organiser of 1000Mokos) who were both excited and welcomed me and the research process. After conversation with Seiwrattan, he informed that Moko Somokow mas camp would not be open until January, but to keep in contact and visit as soon as it was open. He also informed in the discourse that whatever research I had or photos I had of the band when the visits begin in the mas camp I would not be able to share them until Carnival.

Chen invited me to attend the ‘Sticks in De Yard’ sessions. Due to certain circumstances and responsibilities, my ability to attend the sessions was limited to my participation on December 1st, 2019. The session then was held at Alice Yard, Port of Spain (the at time home of 1000Mokos). Sometimes the group held sessions outside of its home and made sessions available in Paramin and Arima. As Chen said over the phone and promoted on the 1000Mokos social media, the sessions are open to anyone free of charge.

An observation of participation of the ‘Sticks in De Yard’ session was the varying ages of people present. The age group of those on sticks (sticks being the jargon used instead of the word stilts) seemed to range from four years old to adults in late twenties. Older persons such as parents were present as well, but they participated more as onlookers rather than walking on sticks.

The sequence of events for the session included a sign-up sheet, allowing each participant to receive sticks and for those who needed to learn be attended to in the order of the sign up sheet with availability of volunteers. The sign-up sheet was a tool to create an order for teaching on a

first-come-first-serve basis. Once people began singing up, Chen and other members/volunteers used the sheet to identify persons to start training first. They taught such basics as how to attach the sticks to your legs. In the process of the day and study, many different methods were observed such as: tying with cloth at all points (knees and feet), having shoes permanently attached to the stick, using belts or aeroplane seat belts fixed to the stick, or any combination of those methods. Despite the method it was necessary at all points to have a piece of sponge or foam wrapped around your knee before the stick is fastened in that area. The process that Chen taught to those who were new, (this could also be based on availability of the types of sticks), was how to attach yourself by tying with cloth at every point.

In the process of Chen teaching, the realisation of how trusting and engaging the group 1000Mokos is began. After having tied the child's first leg (see fig. 1), Chen invited me to tie the second leg with his supervision (see fig. 2). The trusting aspect began at the point of realising you are allowing someone to attach you to sticks safely, especially someone who just learnt how to do it. However once both legs were securely attached there was another step before you can stand which Chen labelled 'the wiggle test.' The wiggle test is simply sticking your foot with the stilt all the way out before you stand and shaking gently (wiggling) your foot to see if anything feels loose. If something feels loose, refasten that area. I believe for longer sticks the wiggle test may not be an appropriate method of checking however I have also noticed longer sticks tend to have shoes fastened to the stick already so the objective depends on how the knee is secured.



Figure 1: Kriston Chen attaching child's foot to stilt. Photograph by author.



Figure 2: Jordon Briggs (author) tying a child's leg to the stick. Photograph by Nicolin Harris

When it came to walking, the concept can be described as a process of trying to find your balance, understanding your centre of gravity and remembering to raise your legs. Chen and some other helpers described the initial process as imagining being in a march past. A notable phrase Chen uses to help explain the process is: “Feel it. Push into the ground and let the ground push you back up.”

Other stilt walking concepts, such as reaching for things and falling, change the perspective of how you move and control your body. When reaching for things, the normal instinct of grabbing or trying to reach it while moving towards the object cannot work. Instead one has to make their way to what they are trying to reach then extend their arm. Similarly, for the concept of falling, the aim is to land on your knees, and not stick your arms out. Almost as if one is in a ninety degree or kneeling position. This is to prevent the least amount of damage if any should occur.

By the end of the session I began to further understand and see the group 1000Mokos for what it is. It is not just a group of people learning or practising walking on sticks and it is not simply just a Moko Jumbie group. It is a community effort where persons are looking out for one another, helping, encouraging, engaging, involving and constantly contributing, due to the groups age there is no sign of cultural legacy involved but rather the good will of its participants. While in the group you are in a space that welcomes everyone and wants to see you learn. Wherever 1000Mokos is, there is a community and safe space follows with it.

There were two more “Sticks in De Yard” sessions since December 1st. Both of which I was unable to attend because their sessions were not accessible for me to leave my weekend job briefly. One session happened on December 9th in Paramin with the Next Level Devils, a Blue Devil group based in the rural community located in the Northern Range, and the other on the 15th in Arima. Although I was unable to attend, my presence and sharing of the session on

December 1st via social media got people interested and which resulted in more participation from people who attended the session in Arima.

Yard Core:

The year rolled over, and sessions with 1000Mokos started back. This time it was not ‘Sticks in De Yard,’ now it was called Yard Core. Promoted on the group’s social media as a session every Sunday until Carnival from twelve to two in the afternoon at the Queens Park Savannah. In the promotion of the session there was a requirement for persons attending to bring their own sticks. The need for one to bring their own sticks suggested to whom the session was catered. Yard Core sessions were not offering the opportunity to teach people how to walk. The sessions were meant to prep Moko Jumbies for carnival, allowing them to walk in a group, build stamina, and practise in the open. Although the sessions were open to anyone, there were less children than commonly seen at ‘Sticks in De Yard’ sessions.

During the Yard Core sessions certain concepts of being in a Moko Jumbie group began to materialise. These concepts included ground team, setting up, and moving together. The ground team are persons who are on the ground (not on sticks) and assist the Moko Jumbies by: reaching for things on the ground/a level that cannot be reached, helping adjust ties, looking out for things that could hinder how the Moko Jumbies walk and helping those who need assistance stepping over certain objects or crossing the road.

While attending the Yard Core sessions in the beginning there was an expectation that activity would begin by noon, instead it started closer to one. This was when I realised the concept of setting up and moving together as a unit was in play. The group did not begin walking until

everyone was properly set up. This was a contrast to ‘Sticks in De Yard’ as Moko Jumbies went up one by one and those with their own sticks went up on their own time.

Chen explained that the idea of the session was meant to help prepare everyone for Carnival by walking the stretch of the Savannah on sticks and also for people to see Moko Jumbies and raise an awareness or presence to the character. It was in these sessions that the idea of tricks and different feats became a reality to me (see figs. 3 and 4).



Figure 3: Tekel ‘Salti’ Lingo Sylvan practicing a trick before the group began to move.

Photograph by author.



Figure 4: Tekel 'Salti' Lingo Sylvan coming down after standing on top of the table at Queen's Park Savannah. Photograph by author.

During the Yard Core sessions members of the Moko Somokow band were also present. This was when I met Alan Vaughn and we talked while walking. The conversations did not go too in depth to any particular topic, but these conversations introduced the ideas of Orisha influence to the Moko Jumbies, and the presence of Moko Jumbies outside of Trinidad and the Caribbean.

There was also something Vaughn told me while walked: "I'll let you in on a secret, a Moko Jumbie tip. The trick is drinking a little rum. It really helps you know, you loosen up so much more and you don't feel it as much. You think it would make things worse, but it actually makes it so much better."

These conversations with Vaughn were the starting point of digging deeper and helping to understand the ritualistic and performative aspects of being a Moko Jumbie which would be explored in Chapter 3.

Belmont is Love:

The following Yard Core sessions, (January 26th, 2020) leading to Carnival began at Granderson Lab, Belmont. This was to facilitate Junior Panorama. The move to Granderson unknowingly at the time blurred the lines of 1000Mokos and Moko Somokow. Granderson Lab is the location of the Moko Somokow mas camp and also became the new home for 1000Mokos. It became hard to distinguish between who was 1000Mokos and Moko Somokow. While the groups do not have any rivalry or factions, they were still two separate entities - one being a learning space and one being a mas band. It felt like a merge into one giant group of Moko Jumbies with the understanding that 1000Mokos and Moko Somokow were somewhere in there and I believe Belmont feels the same way.

Just as the Paramin community – located in the hills above Trinidad’s capital city - is known for being the home of blue devils, Belmont was becoming the home of Moko Jumbies. Persons seemed happy and excited to see the Moko Jumbies. The stilt walkers quickly became a familiar sight. Many people stopped to talk or ask questions and compared to the Savannah location, there were more friendly interactions in Belmont. While 1000Mokos has the community aspect to its group, it had now rooted itself into a community. Although the integration and assimilation of the group into Belmont happened quickly, the presence of Moko Somokow having been in Granderson Lab for the past two years sped up the process of familiarity.

There is a sign on a street in Belmont that reads “Belmont is Love” (see fig. 5). The phrase became well known in the Moko Somokow mas camp and within the 1000Mokos group. Vaughn refers to this sign and phrase with the integration of the Moko Jumbies into the community of Belmont. For him, it referred to how closely knit everything was and how shared the community space is.



Figure 5: Belmont is Love. Photograph by Alan Vaughn.

Vaughn continuously tells the story of the banner that was made for Moko Somokow 2020 as an example of this. He explained that with the busyness of the mas camp this year and all that was going on they did not have time to make a sign themselves. A friend within the Belmont community directed him to someone who paints signs, but when he went to look for the person

he was not home. The following day the mechanic across the road from the mas camp approached Vaughn and said “I heard you were looking to get a sign painted, I told the guy to come check you today to do it for you.” There are other stories and events that depict the community aspect of the band’s integration into Belmont however this specific event is always at the forefront of the stories told.

CHAPTER 3: RITUALS AND PERFORMANCE – A PRAYER AND A DANCE

This chapter analyses the ritualistic and performative aspects of the Moko Jumbie. It discusses key moments and events in my experiences with the Moko Somokow band and its members: The Moko Somokow band launch on February 11th, 2020; the Traditional Mas Competition on February 18th, 2020; and Camboulay morning on February 21st, 2020. These moments were chosen as they offer the most context and insight to the performative and ritualistic aspects of the Moko Jumbie and set the framework for understanding their presentation on Carnival Tuesday. Carnival Tuesday having an important roll in the study as it is what most events are in preparation for and the largest performance the Moko Jumbie would participate in for the season in Trinidad.

Rituals of the Moko:

On January 30th, 2020, Moko Somokow posted a picture of Alan Vaughn and ‘Salti’ as Baron La-Kwa and Baron Samedi¹ respectively. Attached to the photo was the caption “Announcing that Baron La-Kwa and Baron Samedi have arrived for Carnival. Let the Mayhem commence.” At first there was a belief that this was the portrayal of the band for this year and it was the beginning or a tease of what was meant to come. The Baron costumes were present for the band launch as the band paraded a block of the Belmont community leading back to the mas camp.

¹ Baron Samedi (also known by other names) is a loa/god in the Haitian Vodou pantheon. This loa represents the dead

However, by the time of Traditional Mas competition, there was a switch in costumes. Vaughn was no longer dressed as Baron La Kwa and ‘Salti’ no longer dressed as Baron Samedi.

However, at the band launch it was announced that the band will be basing their costumes and characters from a Wilson Harris novel for a second time. In 2019 the band used the novel ‘Palace of the Peacock,’ and moving forward in 2020 Moko Somokow now displayed ‘Resurrection at Sorrow Hill.’

Going forward Vaughn was now dressed in his costume from the portrayal, Resurrection at Sorrow Hill, Hope protector of rainforest. ‘Salti’ rotated costumes - between Christopher D’earth Winder of the spider clock (a portrayal under the Resurrection at Sorrow Hill and one of the Kings of the band) and ‘Oops Let’s Play’ which is a character ‘Salti’ designed on his own. For circumstances where the King could not be entered into competitions, like the traditional mas competition at Adam Smith Square which was based on individual costumes, ‘Salti’ was seen portraying ‘Oops Let’s Play’.

Seeing that the portrayal of the band for 2020 was based off of Wilson Harris’ novel, ‘Resurrection at Sorrow Hill’ what was the purpose and reasoning behind the Barons presence?

Samedi is also sometimes known as Baron Cimeterre (Lord of the Cemetery), and this reflects his role, which is often controlling access to the underworld, determining when and how an individual’s life will end, and protecting the underworld from intrusion by the living.

Samedi is generally depicted dressed completely in black, with dark glasses, and is often associated with bones, skulls and other death-related imagery. Baron Samedi often smokes cigars, and tobacco is used as an offering at shrines dedicated to him. He is also

said to sit on a throne decorated with a cross and has therefore become associated with Christian cross symbols. Though the cross imagery may have derived from syncretism with Christianity, the cross itself is an ancient symbol that also appears in native African spiritual symbolism. (Issitt and Main 2014)

In an interview with Vaughn he explained that the Barons were a symbol for the beginning of Carnival and they referenced Haitian mas. He said that the Barons are a bridge between the world of the living and the dead, but they love to party and have fun.

Moko Somokow uses the Barons as a ritualistic opening for their band presentation and by doing so they aim to extend the idea of Baron masquerade in Trinidad. The choice of what character is portrayed and how they are used is clear as a ritual of the Moko Jumbie. However, before members could enter the world costumed there is a process to getting ready that becomes its own ritual. This ritual follows the idea of masking.



Figure 6: Alan Vaughn in his Baron costume. Photograph by author.

Vaughn requested not to have photographers around while the members get ready. He does not appreciate persons taking photos and videos of them in that intimate process. Vaughn commented on the idea of photographers taking photos during the process:

“How would you like it if I stood in your bedroom and watched you dress. That would be weird wouldn’t it? So why should they stand there and watch us dress and take pictures of it?”

However, having witnessed the process of getting ready for the Traditional Mas competition I saw that it entails an intimacy within the band and solidifies the idea of a family. At this moment the mas camp was filled with members helping each and painting each other but there was a certain controlled chaos as persons ran around not being able to find certain parts of the costume, trying to fix things, improvise and make additions. In this chaos, people were also getting

mentally prepared for performing. Some took on different personas once their costumes were on. One member of the band Xevran Ivvera made this comment about Shynel Brizan, the Queen of the band:

“When Shynel’s costume comes on there is a different atmosphere and vibe to her. It’s like if she actually becomes a Queen and she holds herself with this regal status. It’s like ‘you can’t talk to me’ and it always gets me like ‘woah’”

After masking themselves and getting ready, most Mokos do not get onto their sticks without Vaughn anointing it first. An unknowing practice to some, every time Vaughn is about to go up, he anoints his sticks as well as the others around him. The process of anointing the sticks relates to the Orisha faith and Vaughn making a prayer to Esu.

Vaughn described that the sticks have powers and you have to respect the sticks, “you never just get on your stick and walk. You’re not just a circus walker.” He explained that the education and preparation process for understanding this aspect to their performance began in 2015, when bringing out the mas Sweet Waters of Africa. Esu was the central figure of the mas and the King’s costume also portrayed the Orisha deity:

I always anoint the sticks. I usually use some olive oil to ground the sticks to the earth.

There is some fresh water for Esu and some sweets, usually tobacco or alcohol and fresh water for Oshun. You always need to respect Esu before you do anything with your sticks ‘cause he can just cause trouble. He’s not bad, but in the Christian church they think of him a bit like the devil. And there is a bit of him like with a different tradition of the Barons also, there is a bit of Esu in there...He’s a gate keeper. There is even a song they

play ago ago loona it means clear the way it's for Esu. So that's why it's part of our mas, as soon as I heard Freetown with that song, I said this is the one. (Vaughn, 2020)

The final note about the Moko Jumbie performance ritual has to do with alcohol consumption. While there was not any detailed discussion past what Vaughn mentioned at the Yard Core session, his comment was meant to initiate the observation. Typically, those on sticks would have drank either before or right as they went up. While it can be noted that not everyone drank, most members did. The apparent drinks of choice for the Moko Jumbies in Moko Somokow were Magnum Tonic Wine and vodka. There was occasionally beer and Hennessey as well. I noticed that alcohol consumption for the Mokos held true to Vaughn's words that members who drank were able to move more freely on the sticks. Based on certain conversations there is a belief among some members as well that the slight intoxication can ease or lessen the fear or pain of a fall, if the unfortunate circumstance were to occur, for those on higher sticks.

Performing the Moko Dance:

As a Moko Jumbie it is simple to walk on sticks once one has the capacity but what does it mean to perform, and is there a difference between walking and performing? An observation can be made separating the two, describing walking simply as movement on sticks whereas performing involves several different aspects. These aspects include how the Moko Jumbie interacts with people, how the Moko dances and does tricks, and how the Moko uses and displays the costume they are wearing.

Observing members of Moko Somokow at the three stated events the performance of a Moko Jumbie can be broken up into layers that build on each other. The first layer for the performance

is dance. While there is no set dance or choreography for every Moko to follow, the members were seen dancing moving to the beat of the music around them. During the band launch for Moko Somokow there was a procession of drums to which the Mokos moved. Everyone's movement was similar in style. This could be due to limitations of movement on sticks versus being on the ground and/or having been around each other for several years that there is a subconscious style in movement. However, while there were similarities in movement each member carried it slightly different or added their own flair which made it unique. It can be noted that they fed off of each other's energy joining others doing certain steps.



Figure 7: Moko Jumbies following each other's steps during Moko Somokow band launch.

Photograph by author.



Figure 8: Moko Jumbies following each other's steps during Moko Somokow band launch.

Photograph by author.

Besides dancing to the music that surrounds them and spontaneously coordinating certain movements with each other, some Moko Jumbies use different tricks as part of their performance. Tricks commonly seen are: Limbo, Stoop, Lara, the Moko Train, Butterfly and the Split, (see Appendix A for description of tricks). These tricks are not essential to the performance as some Moko Jumbies, while able to dance and perform in their costume, are unable to do tricks. However, those that can add a flair to their performance that commonly impresses those around them (other members of the band, onlookers, and judges if there are any). The performances of those with the ability to do tricks are not oversaturated based on tricks alone as they incorporate dance as well as their costume into the performance.

When coordinating their movement for the performance between the dance and tricks if any, most Moko Jumbies use their costume for part of their performance - typically showing it off. If

costumes possess a lot of cloth, persons can be seen using the cloth swaying it in the dance or holding it to imitate wings and moving their arms to imitate flapping.

The final layer of Moko Jumbie performance has to do with the interaction with the onlookers.

The most common forms of interacting noted was with reaching for onlookers, using costumes to wave at persons and also stooping and coming close to faces to inspect the crowd. The Moko Jumbies interacting with the onlookers typically left them in awe and further admiration of the costume.

CHAPTER 4: CARNIVAL TUESDAY – THE SEASON FINALE

Since 2012, the members of Moko Somokow have aimed to be make an adult Moko Jumbie band that would appear on the road – a goal triggered in response to what has been the more common sight of children Moko Jumbie bands. This chapter looks at Moko Somokow's participation in the Carnival Tuesday events for 2020. A number of factors have affected their involvement in past carnivals, including illness, transport, location, getting the correct registration and passes, costumes being stolen, sticks breaking, family emergencies and some people in the band not seeing eye-to-eye. In 2018, this band of Moko Jumbies were officially dubbed Moko Somokow and Carnival 2020 is the second time the band has made an appearance on the road for Carnival Monday and Tuesday; crossing four stages in Port of Spain without any major hiccups and completing the full carnival route.

On Carnival Tuesday, Moko Somokow left its Belmont home to parade the Port of Spain streets around 10am. The band comprised Moko Jumbies in costume at varying heights. Individuals, Kings and the Queen were all present. Ground walkers (those in costume but not on sticks) and the ground team were also part of the parade. A Baby Doll and a Burroquite could be seen accompanying the band. Before leaving the mas camp the rituals were followed. Vaughn had everyone's sticks lined up one by one on the stairs of the mas camp and anointed each pair individually. The process and ritual of getting ready and putting things together were set into overdrive. There was now several more persons in the mas camp getting ready at a time. Persons switching from painting themselves or helping others to making additions and tweaks to their costume. Before the band left its Belmont home, everyone was occupied fulfilling their tasks – getting ready for their grand performance for the world. It was also in these moments that bonds

strengthening the Moko family were born. Friendships were being created, which brought everyone closer together.



Figure 9: Moko Somokow on Erthig Road, Belmont headed towards Queens Park Savannah to begin their parade. Photo by Maria Nunes – used with permission



Figure 10: Russell Grant of Moko Somokow walking along Jerningham Avenue towards Queens Park Savannah. Photo by Shaun Rambaran – used with permission

The band followed the route of Jerningham Avenue to the Queen's Park Savannah. Having crossed the Savannah stage, it continued down Victoria Avenue, meeting the Victoria Square stage then, moving down Richmond Street. This led the band to South Quay, crossing the stage on the street, then making its way to the final stage at Piccadilly street. The band then made its way from Piccadilly, through Port of Spain, back to its Belmont home on Erthig Road. This route was accompanied by two vans, one of which had scaffolding installed in its tray for use by the taller Moko Jumbies.

Being on the road, all the aspects of rituals and performance shone tenfold. So did the support. At different instances of crossing the stage, and stepping up and down from certain places, there

was ground walker or someone on the ground team there to give support. There were stops to check and adjust sticks whenever needed. Those who were stronger on sticks stayed at the back of the band as it moved, in an effort to look out for everyone and guide the pace of walking.

Most carnival bands, typically ranging from small to large bands have certain features that accompany the band. They may vary by band, but the common elements are security, drinks trucks, music trucks, and toilet trucks. The Moko Jumbie band had accommodations ready for its masqueraders, however they differed from the norm. There were two vans with long trays present, one of which had a scaffolding set up in its tray for access to taller Moko Jumbies to either rest or adjust straps. These vans also served as storage for the band allowing persons to put pieces of their costumes or sticks in the tray if they were to take them off. The two trucks also held: supplies for emergency repair of costumes, a first aid kit, a cooler that stored all the drinks, a bag with the band's food, and a cooler full of sugar cane as snacks. There were also accommodations for Shynel Brizan, the queen of the band. They left room in one of the trucks for her as she was pregnant at the time. While the band did not have the typical features, they were resourceful in their provisions and the two trucks were enough for all band members.



Figure 11: Masquerader Danielle Elliott sitting on top of the scaffolding inside the truck while waiting to cross the Piccadilly stage on Carnival Tuesday. Photo by author

As for music, the band did not have a music truck but moved to the beats and sounds of whatever nearby music truck filled the space. While crossing the stage Catherine Chang Kit (the band manager) gave a flash drive to the DJs at the stage. The flash drive contained two songs, which would serve as the accompanying tracks for the Moko Jumbie group to perform while crossing the stage. The first song played was, RAM's 'Erzulie-O' followed by Freetown Collective's 'We Bad'.

While crossing the stages the band added a theatrical element to their performance. Brizan, who was not on sticks, led the band's procession while 'Erzulie-O' played. She was accompanied and followed by her entourage of ground walkers. Once the ground walkers crossed, individual

costumes followed, continued by those in general costumes and the line ending with the kings.

When everyone entered the stage, the music switched to 'We Bad.' During the time on the stage all the previously discussed aspects of performance took place, now with several more eyes on the band. Being on the stage and performing in those moments can be described as freeing - a moment where one does not have to think. Whatever capability a person has, came naturally in those moments.

Vaughn explained that one of the stage performance aspects he enjoyed was seeing a mix of heights: ground walkers and the Moko Jumbies. According to him, the varying heights added a visual to the group that makes it beautiful – like a sea of Moko Jumbies with the people being the waves. This visual is something Vaughn is happy to create within the band.



Figure 12: Shynel Brizan having piece of her costume attached to her while Moko Somokow gets ready to cross the Piccadilly stage. Photo by author.

Like other events leading towards Carnival Monday and Tuesday, persons were interested in seeing Moko Jumbies. During Carnival, the level of interaction increased tenfold with the amount of people on the road. Many people wanted pictures with the band or some members in their costumes, most people getting stopped every other minute. Parents stopped children to point out the Moko Jumbies and tell them briefly about the mas as the band passed. The performances of the Moko seemed to have everyone's interest with all eye on the band and its members not only performing for the judges and showing off the costumes but putting on a show for the people on the ground. Band members interacted with onlookers all day, sparing no expense at these moments.

The journey Moko Somokow made that day, ended with some masqueraders staying in sticks the whole time although they took off parts of their costume and headed back to their Belmont home from the Piccadilly Street competition point. While moving through the crowd those with energy still danced to the steelband going in the same direction. It was at this point, while walking up Charlotte Street, the amount of interaction with other masqueraders and onlookers started to decrease.

Most persons and other bands were considerate of those on sticks, allowing room to pass. On two occasions, once at Victoria Square and the other at South Quay a band allowed the mini Moko Somokow band to go in front of them to cross the stage first. The support system created from the band from the ground team and the ground walkers was exceptional. Even the Moko Jumbies looking out for each other having to do an emergency costume procedure on Danielle Elliott after her backpack for her individual costume became unwieldy against the wind in South Quay.

All these things taken into account led to Moko Somokow having a successful and safe Carnival while performing the Moko Jumbie mas.

The After Credits:

The band's close bonds were not severed once Carnival was over. A sense of family could be seen in initiatives to have multiple clean-ups of their home at Granderson Lab. The first clean-up was held on the Thursday after carnival. Band members organised the space, cleaned everything and sorted costumes that were left in the mas camp after Carnival Tuesday. The initiative of cleaning continued on March 7th, 2020, originally the day was set aside for one last photo shoot with photographer Jason Audain. However, Brizan gave birth to her son Kenji the night before, adding to the Moko family, and the decision was made that the photoshoot could not happen without the Queen of the band. Thus, the second cleaning initiative came to light. During the second cleaning of the mas camp everything was organised and packed to be stored at the band leaders' home, leaving the mas camp empty and Granderson Lab free to be used by other artists in its down time.

Moko Somokow won mini band of the year and was invited to perform at Champs in Concert on February 29th 2020. While the full band was not present for this event, this was the last appearance the Moko Jumbies made in costume for the year. This, however, did not stop the Moko family from seeing each other, with multiple celebrations happening after Carnival - the final celebration happening at a member's home on March 10th 2020 as farewell party for Vaughn until he returns to Trinidad for the next Carnival season.

1000Mokos – New Home, Who This:

With Moko Somokow and 1000Mokos now sharing a home in Belmont, and many of their members straddling and serving both groups, it can be understood that an indistinguishable bond has formed between Moko Somokow and 1000Mokos.

Although Carnival was finished it was not over for the Moko Jumbies. With the move to Belmont, 1000Mokos spent time trying to rearrange and reorganise itself, reflecting on how the group might proceed throughout 2020 with new goals and objectives. There were instances of walks happening around the Savannah using outside of Granderson as a starting point with a few members of the group. The plan for ‘Sticks in De Yard’ to start back on March 29th 2020 now being led by Shaun Rambaran and Catherine Chang Kit was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following rules and regulations for everyone’s safety, all Moko Jumbie activities were put on a pause due to the pandemic, bringing an end to the physical intimacy and moments shared by the groups. However, this did not put a stop to Moko Jumbies making their presence known. Social media pages are constantly in use for sharing and posting photographs from Carnival 2020, and for issuing Moko Jumbie art challenges to be taken up by persons staying at home in the fight against COVID-19.

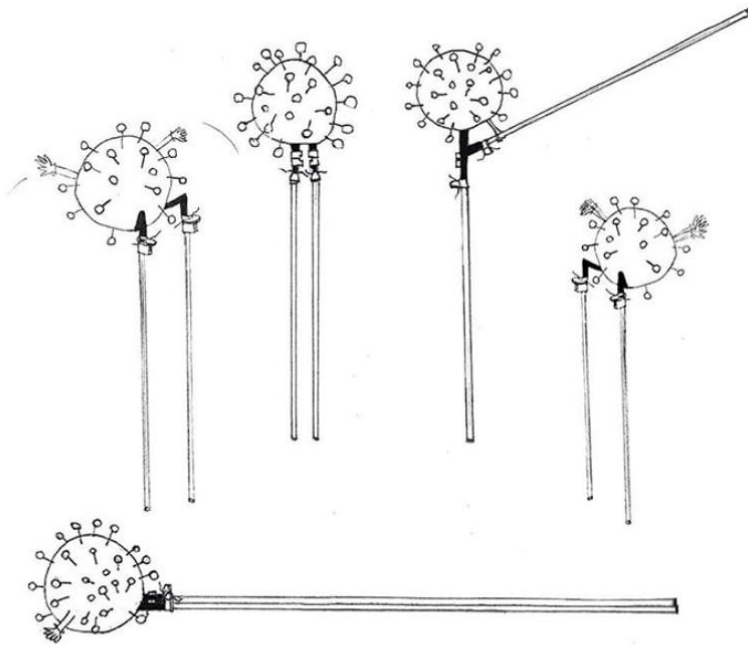


Figure 13: A drawing by Kirston Chen as part of the Moko Jumbie art challenge under the prompt ‘Covid Jumbie.’

CONCLUSION

Having intensely followed the two groups for four months many questions were asked, and many lessons were learned. One of the biggest questions through the process was ‘What does it mean to be a Moko Jumbie?’ This did not seem to have a straightforward answer but through the ethnographic study it can be concluded that it relates to the energy and commitment in performing the character. The study also was able to highlight and educate on the concepts of preparation, performance and rituals of the character and exposing its depth and routes deep within Caribbean history.

While activities worldwide have been put on pause and many may not know what the future holds due to the pandemic, the Moko Jumbie spirit continues to look forward and brighten those around. This can be seen through the consistently active 1000Mokos’ social media creating an art challenge open to anyone and sharing the participation. The group’s social media platform has also been sharing highlights of Moko Jumbie activities from Carnival 2020 through photography and videography.

The community effort and support that has been observed by the groups in the four-month period has not ceased. A note, after the study was complete, Moko Somokow was supporting its members in need during the current global crisis through its attempts to share goods with members in need.

Overall, the study proved to show depth to the Moko Jumbie character and evidence of the characters ritualistic and performative aspects.

WORKS CITED

Briggs, Jordon, and Veynu Siewrattan “Moko Somokow Band Leader Interview.” 29 Nov 2019

Briggs, Jordon, and Alan Vaughn “Interview with Alan Vaughn.” 9 Mar 2020

Browne, Kevin Adonis. *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Culture*. 2018.

Falke, Stefan. *Moko Jumbies: the Dancing Spirits of Trinidad*. Pointed Leaf Press, LLC, 2004.

Figure 2: Harris, Nicolin. *Jordon Tying Tiny Jumbie*. Port of Spain.

Figure 5: Vaughn, Alan. *Belmont Is Love*. Port of Spain.

Figure 9: Nunes, Maria. *Moko Somokow Group Photo*. Port of Spain.

Figure 10: Rambaran, Shaun. *Russel Grant in King Montezuma Costume*. Port of Spain.

Figure 13: Chen, Kirston. “Covid-19 Jumbie 2021.” *Instagram*, 1000Mokos, 3 May 2020,

https://www.instagram.com/p/B_uM_L5Je3j/?igshid=1txv0ygplz1f6.

Funk, Ray. “Walk Tall, Moko Jumbie.” *Caribbean Beat*, 2018,

<https://www.caribbean-beat.com/issue-149/walk-tall-closeup#axzz6827bKs6z>.

Grant, L. Trevor. *Carnivalitis: The Conflicting Discourse of Carnival*. 2004.

Issitt, Micah, and Carlyn Main. *Hidden Religion: The Greatest Mysteries and Symbols of the World's Religious Beliefs*. ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014.

Kerrigan, Dylan. “Catching the Carnival Jumbie.” *Caribbean Beat*, 2009,

<https://www.caribbean-beat.com/issue-59/catching-carnival-jumbie#axzz6827bKs6z>

McAlister, Elizabeth A. "Vodou."

<https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.sastudents.uwi.tt/levels/collegiate/article/Vodou/75734>.

Nicholls, Robert Wyndham. *The Jumbies' Playing Ground: Old World Influences on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean*. 2012.

Springer, Pearl Eintou. "The Role of Orisa in Carnival." 23 Oct. 1999.

APPENDIX A

Description of Moko Jumbie Tricks:

Limbo: Like the movement during Limbo, the Moko Jumbie bends their upper body backwards forming almost a 90 degree angle.

Stoop: Similar to the execution of stooping however the body floats in the air with the knees as the anchor point to the sticks

Lara: An imitation of the pose commonly seen when the cricketer Brian Lara is batting, having one foot forward and bent the other straight down.

the Moko Train: two Moko Jumbies placing one stick in the air and each holding the stick of their partner.

Butterfly: Similar to the dance move done on the ground, the butterfly is done in a somewhat stooping position and the legs are repeatedly opened and closed mimicking a flapping movement of butterfly wings

Split: A Moko Jumbie takes one leg sticking it in the air forming a lateral split.

APPENDIX B

Interview questions for Veynu Seiwrattan:

What does Moko Somokow mean?

How did Moko Somokow start?

How long has Moko Somokow been operating?

Why did you start it (if you did)?

How many members do you typically get?

Have you noticed a rise in the popularity for Moko Jumbies?

What is normally the design process for the band?

Do you train people how to walk on stilts or is that done externally?

Has the band gone on the road every year carnival Monday and Tuesday?

I remember seeing you at Camboulay last year. Do you normally take part in Camboulay as well or was that a first?

What other events does the band make appearances in?

What does it mean to be a Moko Jumbie?

Is there a ritual that is done before a performance?

Do the players of the Moko Jumbie take on a different personality while in character?

Interview questions for Alan Vaughn:

When did you learn to walk on sticks?

How long have you been walking/What has your journey as Moko been like?

How did you get involved with Moko Jumbies/What is your history – relation to it?

What does it mean to respect the stick?

What is your process for anointing the sticks and what is it that you use to do it?

What is the full meaning to you anointing the sticks?

What does it mean to be a Moko Jumbie?

How did you get involved with Moko Somokow and designing for them?

What is your design process like for the band?

How do you decide what you base the designs off of (Wislon Harris Palace of the peacock 2019, Wilson Harris Resurrection at sorrow hill 2020)?

Why the change from the Baron La Kaw and Baron Samedi to Hope and Opps Lets Play?