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# Masculinities in Motion

Photo Essay

*Gabrielle Jamela Hosein*



Figure 1: Tending Nets on the Wharf  
All author photos 2004

Almost appearing to float on the water, a fisherman's net billows as it is being mended onshore. Net mending pays almost TT\$500<sup>1</sup> a day, but this man's pride is not in his earnings. It is in his hard-earned skill and the dexterity required of net mending. Here, he proudly shows me his tools, his conductor's graceful moves and the threads that link his trade to his stories about how time has changed life on the San Fernando King's Wharf.



Figure 2: Save the Last Dance for Me

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<sup>1</sup> As at January 2007, TT\$500 is approximately US\$30.

To surrender to what is in their imagination, men will do whatever it takes to satisfy their longing. In the bars around the market, men beg, hustle “small wuk” for a few dollars or steal and sell. “Bay rum”, made from the leaves of the bay tree and used by mothers to rub on children’s fevered heads, is often the cheapest alcohol to buy. This man has earned enough to purchase the illusion of having a woman to hold in his arms and dance tenderly. The chutney song “Rum till I die” is blaring from rum shop speakers with its lament, “she tell me she doh love me and that’s the reason why...”



Figure 3: Imagining Fatherhood

Some men ‘create’ fatherhood, which then becomes a compelling motive to work. A father tries to secure temporary employment so that he can support his common-law partner and son. Yet, the boy is a neighbour’s child. His mother couldn’t look after him as well as the young couple nearby. So, without any formal “paper”, the couple has informally adopted him. The three live together in one room they built from gathered and donated materials. This union is a long Caribbean tradition of making family that defy “fictive” and “blood” categories, and rules regarding legitimacy.



Figure 4: Making Style and Money

This young man’s cart is overflowing with colourful treasure comprising almost anything a passer-by might want to possess. Indeed, it creates desire. In classic, advertising counter-logic, it says, “more is less!” “spend and save!” The shopping cart, turned travelling discount warehouse, creates an aesthetic derived from need, extravagance, promise and ambition. The vendor’s relationship to his means of transportation, choice of goods and style of layout all suggest his readiness to earn a dollar despite any obstacle and at almost any cost, but with immense character and style.



Figure 5: Patterns Make the Man

“Fancy Indian” mas bandleader Lionel Jagessar told me, “One time, if you come out in more rhinestones you is the real man. We used to come out with more beads”. Complex bead patterns on his “roach” style headpiece and jacket, and rich plumage redefine masculine status. Each bead, and then bead pattern, is sewn in place. The arresting effect of them all laid against the body trumpets the kingly claim of this “East” Indian artist in the Carnival season.



Figure 6: Bois!

In the ritualized violence of Carnival, blood – drawn, felt and noticed, ascribes royal status. When they are about to fling a blow on their opponent in the stickfighting circle or *gayelle*, men shout “bois!” French for “wood”, literally calling the stick to travel though the air. The power of manhood is a “buss head”. Gripping the eye of the entire crowd, gathered on the San Fernando Wharf repeating “bois!” to make the blow materialize, this stick made from the harder “Poui” must crack skulls and turn a man from fighter into winner.

Men’s aspirations and emotions mediate their participation in a marketplace, a Carnival “mas” camp and a fishing wharf in San Fernando, Trinidad. Each man’s narrative exposes how pride, love, livelihood, family, ambition or violence can be interwoven with masculinity. They illuminate the significance of men’s relationships to each other, to things and to what they do.