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## “Crick”? “Crack”! Jeweled peacock stories

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## **“Crick”? “Crack”! Jeweled peacock stories**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses the challenges faced and the lessons learned in bringing forth mystery<sup>1</sup> (Ulmer, 1989). The ‘Author’ a self identified native anthropologist having had an experience of the ‘peacock stories’ 3 years after her dissertation field work, finds herself caught in the third space. She returns home to the stories and chooses to use frames drawn from poststructural analytic approaches, hermeneutical phenomenology, and performance theories to make meaning of her experience via its performative representation (Denzin, 2003). She examines the metadiscursive practices (Briggs, 1993) in which she participates and explores how she constitutes and is constituted by the text (s) that is/are unstable. In addition, she puts sous rature the category ‘Author’, explores how it functions to limit/delimit the ‘bringing forth’ of mystery. What are the implications for (auto) ethnographic narratives?*

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## ***Post 22 March 2008***

True, narratives abound after the event, they explain the event, extol it, ethicize it, excuse it, deprecate it, repudiate it, name it as a significant marker of collective experience, as a model for future behavior. (Turner, 1988: 33)

*Jan Jan, it have a fellah named Nasco in south, Cipero Street, at the back of Polytechnic where I went to school, and next to Roy Joseph scheme. He was known for playing big Indian, very elaborate, and there is a "peacock" legend associated with him. One Carnival Monday, he broke down the side of his house to get the costume out, and then his pardnajs [partners/friends] would not stay around to help him put the house back together, because man eh ha time for that on Carnival Monday. I think the legend is he get vex and mash up the costume. .... (Email communication, 22 March 2008<sup>1</sup>).*

“Crick?” “Crack!<sup>2</sup>”

A Trinidadian scholar working in and out of the US responded to the reading of this performance<sup>3</sup> with the above story. Instant, instinctive, and heartfelt could be adjectives used to describe the reader’s response. As scholars and Trinidadians, we shared the realities of the language and the event. It seemed an appropriate an opening and closing scene for an auto (ethnographic) narrative that questioned the absence<sup>4</sup>/presence (Derrida, 1998, 1974, 1967) of ‘peacock stories’ in the dissertation paper (Fournillier, 2005) and the function of ‘Author’. What does a native anthropologist who is struggling with the duality of her positioning (s) do when she experiences an event that challenges the use she made of data previously collected and archived? She returned home to the stories and used frames drawn from poststructural analytic approaches, hermeneutical phenomenology, and performance theories to make meaning of her experience via

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<sup>1</sup> I express my deepest appreciation to my “brother” and fellow Caribbean scholar, Professor Theodore Lewis who responded to the reading with his own ‘peacock story’, Dr Jodi Kaufmann, whose reader/audience performance assisted my bringing forth of the narrative event, and the reviewers who pushed me to deepen and explore my interaction with the theorists on stage.

a performative representation (Denzin, 2003). It was part of an attempt to view performance as a tool that could allow me—ethnographer/researcher/Author/performer/griot—to rethink various relationships—performance and ethnographic praxis, performance and scholarly representation, performance and hermeneutics (Conquergood, 1991, p. 90). Schechner's (1998) description of performances as fluid events that, "Mark identities, bend and remake time, adorn and reshape the body, tell stories, and allow people to play with behavior that is "twice-behaved," not-for-the-first time, rehearsed, cooked, prepared"(p. 361) made it seem possible to make natural text a performance. This discourse seemed to afford a researcher/ethnographer/Author/performer/griot the flexibility and the space to enact the "being, having been, and becoming" (Schechner, 1985, p. 36) of the research process.

### ***Director's Note***

In this paper/narrative event, I/eye<sup>5</sup> write, and co perform with the actors in the field whose 'peacock stories' be-come texts<sup>6</sup>. I/eye choose to use an episodically structured narrative that allowed me to blur the distinction between text, subject, and Author (Denzin, 1990). I/eye assume the role of griot<sup>7</sup> of the African tradition (Stoller, 2002) and put *sous rature* the signifier Author of the Afro-western context. According to Derrida (1998/1974/1967) text is placed *sous-rature* to both undermine and manifest it at the same time. Derrida (1998) explained:

What I call the erasure of concepts ought to mark the places of that future meditation. For the value of the transcendental arche [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. (p.61)

In addition, I/eye explore the implications of opening the process to a reflexive gaze (Davies, et al, 2004; Lather, 1993; Ricoeur, 1991; Spry, 2006), a deconstructive reading (Foucault, 1977; Derrida, 1998), and a performative writing and analysis (Conquergood, 1985, 2000; Schechner,

1985). What would/could happen if I/eye “opened up what seemed ‘natural’ to other possibilities” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478)? Can the stories become<sup>8</sup> “a significant marker of a collective experience”? Could/should the actions possibly become “a model for future behavior” (Turner, 1988, p. 33) of a ‘native anthropologist’? The narrative event begins with a re-view of the positioning(s) and frame (s) and sets the stage for an exploration of “author-function<sup>9</sup>” (Foucault, 1977) as it relates to this paper.

*“Crick? Crack!”*

### ***Re-Frame (s)***

Framing, like all metacommunication, invokes the reflexive consciousness of the participants. Whereas the performer may be unaware of himself or herself as an actor at the moment before the framing takes place, the act of framing, by definition, marks the performer as a performer, marks the audience members as audience members, and calls attention to the fact of interaction. (Berger & Del Negro, 2002, p. 65)

### **Author/Interviewer: Tell me, what brings you to this event?**

Ethnographer/researcher:

One of my marks of identification is that of a Caribbean woman with an interest in practices associated with local<sup>10</sup> popular cultural art forms like Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival. Another mark is that of a US scholar working in and out of anthropological approaches to the study of education. As a self-identified native anthropologist there is that constant negotiating of the unstable “third space” (Bhaba, 1994, p. 37) that “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p. 4). My embodied understandings of how text functions came out of my cultural heritage (s). But, they often conflicted with the accepted rules and genres of the scholarly world that I worked at embodying. The tensions inherent in this positioning, and the pain and anxiety of the post-dissertation experience in the field resulted in the search for

philosophical frames and theories in which, according to Nietzsche (1967) “one feels freest; i.e. in which our most powerful drive feels free to function” (p. 418). What tools could I/eye use to confront the conservativeness that seemed to have driven the dissertation paper? How do I/eye deal with the issues of disembodiment, which often arise from dealing with the “cultural politics of scholarly discourses” (Briggs, 1993, p. 389)?

**Author/Interviewer: And have you been able to begin to answer those questions?**

Ethnographer/researcher:

Both yes and no. I/eye began by re-visiting some of the scholars with whom I became acquainted during my dissertation course work but many of whom did not participate in my dissertation paper process. That re-reading and writing became a form of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I/eye realized that my desire to make-meaning of the processes through which I/eye was subjected to, and constituted by structure and discourse (Davies, 1993) pushed me away from the constructionist positioning of my dissertation to a more poststructuralist approach. According to Davies, (1993) the major difference in the two is that “subjectivity is generally not made problematic in constructionist accounts, and the liberal humanist version of the unitary rational actor is kept intact” (p.13). On reflection, it seems that during this process, I/eye began to constitute and be constituted by the use of poststructural critiques (Butler, 1995; Derrida, 1998/1974/1967; Foucault, 1977; St. Pierre, 2000; Spivak, 1993) hermeneutical phenomenology (Lye, 1996; Ricoeur, 1981, 1991), and performance theories (Conquergood, 1991, 2004; Madison, 2005; Schechner, 1985, 1998; Spry, 2006; Turner, 1988).

Heidegger's (1971) notion that "language speaks man" and that we share a reality through common signs began to resonate with me. As Gadamer (2004) stated in *Truth and Method*, "Thanks to the linguistic nature of all interpretation every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others. There can be no speech that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to" (p. 399). These beliefs were in keeping with my intention to examine the kinds of relationships and non-relationships assumed in Foucault's "author-function".

**Author/Interviewer: And have you been able to begin to answer those questions?**

**Who were some of the other persons with whom you were developing a relationship and what promises were they making that drew you to them?**

Ethnographer/researcher:

Let me begin with Schechner. The relationship that developed with Schechner allowed me to comfortably adopt the notion of "restored behavior" which he stated, "offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they were—or even what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become" (p. 38). My dis-comfort with how the absence/presence of 'peacock stories' and my seemingly colonial attitude needed to change. I did not want to be the lone voice in the paper. I could use the performance frame to deconstruct and reconstruct the 'peacock stories' and my experience.

Paul Ricoeur gradually became another important scholar. Difficult as his philosophical readings were, his challenging discourse on what is text and the upheaval the distancing between speech and the written word caused, were important issues to be confronted. If there was to be an

understanding of author function, Ricoeur needed to be one of the interlocutors. Ricoeur (1991) suggested that,

When the text takes the place of speech, there is no longer a speaker, at least in the sense of an immediate and direct self-designation of the one who speaks in an instant discourse. This proximity of the speaking to his own speech is replaced by a complex relation of the author to the text, a reaction that enables us to say that the author is instituted by the text, that he stands in the space of meaning traced and inscribed by writing. (p. 109)

As an ethnographer/researcher who was using text in place of the speech of the actors in the study, this was indeed one of my concerns. The issues Ricoeur's raised concerning the methodological dualism of explanation and understanding and his suggestion that there be the substitution of dialectic also resonated with me. Ricoeur (1991) explained dialectic as, "The consideration that, rather than constituting mutually exclusive poles, explanation and understanding would be considered as relative moments in a complex process that could be termed interpretation" (p. 126).

At the same time, I/eye was heartened by Foucault's (1977) suggestion that, "The subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies" (p. 137). There was still concern about how the kind of power that this positioning afforded me. Stoller's (2002) warning about accountability for maintaining "representational fidelity to anthropological ways of writing social life" (p. 301) resonated deeply because of my ongoing need to belong to the community. The tension eased somewhat when I came upon the idea of using performance as an analytic frame that could facilitate my understanding via meaning-making and writing. It was a kind of "meaning" that Turner (1988, p. 33) argued, "is not mere cognitive hindsight but something existentially emergent from the entanglement of persons



wholly engaged in issues of basic concerns to the central or representative actors, the formulators of “positions” or life-stances.” I/eye proceeded to “bring forth” a scripted performance on the basis of the following assumptions.

1. “Real science” is not disinterested and neutral and therefore the meanings and or perspectives were linked to social positions (Anderson et al, 2004).
2. Social interactions play an important role in the interpretation of the meanings that the events/stories in the text have for the actors and me (Blumer, 1969);
3. Writing can be constructed as performance and as performative (Pollock, 1998; Madison, 2005).
4. Human beings are *homo performans* (Turner, 1985; Madison, 2005). Performance is significant and important to/in the understanding of culture and self.

From these relationships, I pulled frames that assisted in the deconstructive reading of the text—writing and action—and an analysis interpretation, explanation, and re-presentation of *mystory*. The hope was/is that through an aesthetic reading [like the one my fellow scholar did], the experience would/will become a shared reality (Madison, 2005) and the ethnographer/researcher would become less of the ‘Author’, a position that she could not evade or avoid.

“Crick”? “Crack”!

### ***Voice over: 2008***

*Journey girl, how can we use the concept of the jeweled peacock as a metaphor for you?*

*How do we get you in there without overloading?* (Sistah doctor, Personal communication, December 2005)

The researcher/ethnographer interpreted these words to mean that the listener sensed some resistance on her part to incorporate the peacock stories in her being. My sistah doctor seemed to

sense that the ethnographer I was afraid of being guilty of solipsism and so challenged me to revise the text. Maybe the process of becoming “the material body through whom a narrative structure unfolds” (Bruner, 1986; p. 150) could get the ethnographer me “in there without overloading”. Boje & Dennehy, (1995) suggested deconstruction which would mean a resituating of the hierarchy, restorying, and re-authoring of the text. The push to take the performance in that direction was coming from the feelings of doubt, guilt and emotional anxiety that I had about what I had done/not done with the ‘peacock stories’. I/eye was no longer inclined to be the individual creative scholar or knowing subject of the dissertation analysis who was almost certain that she had discovered the meanings that the participants were making of the practices. The emphasis was now on the multiple ‘I/eyes’, meanings, relationships with the “author-function” and a resituated story in which there were no more centers. Having put on these different masks, I/eye began to learn by, looking closely, listening, embodying the text (Conquergood, 1982) as experience and developing an awareness of the reader’s role.

*[Aside: It is within this imaginative, intellectual, and personal context that this performance is enacted, and the curtain opens to a backdrop that bends time and provides other contexts]*

### ***November 2004-March 2005: Backdrop***

After three years of preparation at a North American university, I/eye returned to my native land to do home work in the field (Fournillier, 2008). I wore the mask of a becoming native ethnographer. I/eye arrived at the space that was my physical “home” for half a century to spend the 2005 Carnival season in Trinidad and Tobago Carnival mas’ camps working with and learning from the mas’ makers. Although I/eye was born and educated for most of my life in this country the intricate activities associated with making the Carnival costumes were not very

familiar to me. I/eye could do the simple decorating that my grandmother taught me and played the role of “spect-actor” (Boal, 1985) and Carnival mas’ player several times. However, I/eye was always fascinated and interested in knowing how the persons involved in the actual design, construction, and building of the costumes came to know these skills. Who were the teachers? How did they learn? Who taught who and when, why, and how? The young men and women whom we as educators in the formal educational system were not able to keep motivated would spend nights and days in the Carnival mas’ camps. Additionally, the mas’ making process was not limited by age, gender, ethnicity, class, or any of the many factors that we use to create social barriers. This site therefore became most appropriate for exploring learning and teaching practices in non-school contexts.

I/eye was fully loaded with: sociocultural theories of learning, anthropological approaches, ethnographic methods of data collection, postcolonial discourses, my digital electronic camera, my lap top, paper and pencil, and my mind/body. Over the three months that followed, I/eye collected photographs, tape recorded and remembered semi-formal and conversational life history interviews, observed, and participated in the mas’ making process and the competitions that preceded the street parade. The recorded data and my memory, which I/eye hoped would last, became my life line to exploring the mas’ makers’ perceptions of their teaching/learning practices. I/eye was an observer on the outside looking in using the tools I brought with me to collect data on an event that was both familiar and unfamiliar. I/eye was a full participant in the making process and in the activity which is the outcome of the making. It was however often difficult and stressful to make these two activities distinctive and separate and so I/eye found

myself having to be continually reflexive and reflective and having to find ways to collect data that would allow for the merger of both activities (Fournillier, 2008).

At the end of the official two days of Carnival celebration in the streets I/eye regrouped and prepared for interviews. I/eye reconnected with mas' makers, actors, and co-participants in the study. These actors were members of the mas' making community with whom I/eye became acquainted during the mas' making process, was introduced to by somebody, or was told about during the mas' making process. Networking and snowballing (Le Compte et al, 1993) were the methods of selection of the actors in the study. It was the time for in-depth and open ended interviews. I/eye structured the process using Spradley (1978 1979) and my training in qualitative research methodology but it only served as a guide and not a standard. I/eye was always conscious of (Smith, 1999) whose work on decolonizing methodology was actively organizing my attention. She stated:

Decolonization, however, has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (Smith 1999, p.39)

Having written this statement for the nth time, the ethnographer/researcher me was beginning to be convinced that the adoption of restored behavior as a frame used to revisit 'peacock stories' was yet another of my ongoing attempts to "decolonize my methodology". "Crick"? "Crack"!"

### ***17 February 2005:***

I/eye had heard from many persons involved in mas' making that I/eye should chat with Jerry<sup>11</sup> because of the work he was doing with children's mas'. I/eye wanted to know how Jerry became involved in mas' making and his perceptions of the teaching/learning practices involved in the

process. We arranged to meet in an open office space that was convenient to both of us and with which we were both familiar. I/eye pulled out my digital tape recorder and tested it to ensure that it was recording well. “Testing one two three, testing one two three.” When I/eye re-played the tape recording, I/eye could hear the tension in my voice as I/eye explained that I/eye was making sure it was ok. I/eye assured Jerry that in spite of the background noise it was a good recorder and would pick up everything. He seemed confident and not a little bit bothered by my nervousness, which I/eye hoped did not show.

Jerry responded to my open ended question that asked him tell me how he came to be a mas’ maker, by telling numerous stories about his life and his personal experiences of becoming a mas’ maker. He set the scene by describing the geographic district in which he grew up and his experiences of seeing his brother and sister making mas’ in a mas’ camp that was their house and home. Jerry constructed himself in the interview as a multi-talented school teacher/mas’ maker/designer/graphic artist/artist. Cognitively, I/eye was processing the words and taking note of what was important to Jerry. I took mental and written notes of his stories. I/eye realized that here was another instance in which a room in the house was the mas’ camp and made a mental note of this. It fit perfectly in my X is a kind of Y domain analysis (Spradley, 1979 1980) that I planned on using as my analytic frame. It was the one that I/eye contracted with my dissertation committee during the prospectus defense meeting. It informed parts of the analysis of the data and creation of my initial “realist” ethnographic case study (Fournillier, 2005). *[Aside: Kvale (1996) advised that the researcher needed to think of how the data were going to be analyzed before they were collected.]* Kvale also became one of the many silent partners in the conversation whose frames seemed to demand accommodation. As Carpanzano so aptly stated,

“There lurks behind every interlocution the opacity—the mind—of the other that casts its shadow on the interlocution” (p. 99). It was not a simply a matter of question and answer or an event in which one person listened and the other responded. It was also a cognitive event in which the researcher/ethnographer found that she embodied the literature read about interviews, was always conscious of her role and responsibility as native ethnographer, and that the expectations she and others had of her and the event, were at work during the interview. The discussion that to all appearances seemed to be taking place between the interviewer and the interviewee involved those persons who were at work in the mind of the interviewer. Here was the one woman audience whose attention was being pulled from the narration by the theories, readings, and voices in her mind. She had her own interest and her research questions that needed to be answered. But Jerry had his own interest and need to share and at the same time the ethnographer/researcher about the cultural experience that made him the mas’ maker he is, became, and was being.

A significant year for Jerry was 1968. He therefore described in great detail the event surrounding it and that made it memorable and concluded by framing himself as someone for whom mas’ was integral....

*That was 1968, and I remember that because we have a little store room and inside the store room they wrote it. So, in a sense mas’ like I say, mas’ was a part and parcel of me. (Interview data, 17 February, 2005)*

*“Crick”? “Crack!”!*

When Jerry told these initial “realist” stories, I/eye became impressed by his credibility. Jerry used the opportunity to present himself as the main character and a griot. He was providing me with the characteristics that made him a mas’ maker with whom I/eye would want to converse. I/eye could trust him. He drew me in to his performance using formal and informal Trinidadian dialect with which I/eye was comfortable. In addition, he took control of the staging of the performance and did not allow for too many cues.

Jerry continued without any prompting on my part to tell “another story” of his experience and its significance to his identity as a mas’ maker...: Crick”? “Crack”!

*Another story is that going, living up on Laventille Rd., and going to Trinity cathedral to church. I use to pass down straight across Prince Street and going by the square.*

*I/eye remember one year I/eye got my tail cut [a whipping] because ... I remember because I reached home late from church. I remember seeing them making a costume. It was Errol Payne’s king. They were making Jeweled Peacock. And this Carnival Sunday it was finished. The costume was finished and I am seeing the peacock inside the house through a little door way. I am saying, I am not leaving until I see that peacock come out of that little door way. Because there was no way that big peacock could come out of that door way. ....And what for me was a major problem for them was small thing. They took a pig foot, [crow bar] and it was a wooden house. They took off the wooden front of the house, drop it in the road, bring the peacock outside, come back out the house, and they went savannah. {See author’s note}I suppose crime and thing was not as it is now but the costume was the more important thing...Of course Errol Payne went on to win king that year with the jeweled peacock.*

“Crick?” “Crack!”

### ***My in-between meaning making***

Having listened to, transcribed, read and re-read this narrative, the researcher/ethnographer ‘I’ had to agree with Turner’s (1982) notion of human beings as “*homo performans*”. Yet, my instinctive reaction while listening to, reading, and embodying the text was to apply the interpretive frame of narrative analysis to it. Influenced by Burke’s dramatic paradigm I/eye immediately pondered my motive and asked the question: “What does it mean and what does it entail when we interpret what people are doing and why they are doing it?”(Madison, 2005, p. 153 cited Burke, 1966). “I” the researcher/ethnographer had the power and responsibilities to make-meaning, interpret, and explain this narrative using writing as a form of discourse. In so doing, I accepted that I was not there to but instead to “bring forth” (Heidegger, 1971). The proof of its success would be the kinds of thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arise because of the discourse and whether or not it served as a form of transfer.

Jerry’s narrative contained the five elements of a Burke’s (1945) dramatic paradigm: the act—what took place; the scene—the background of the act; the agent—who did it; the agency—the means or instruments; and the purpose—why he did it. I could use these five elements to both interpret the story told and the story teller’s motive. I/eye first had to deal with the guilt of moving the narrative from its embodied performance to a consciously reenacted written story. My fear of being condemned to scriptocentrism (Conquergood, 2000, Madison, 2005) pushed me to turn the gaze on not only the text, but also the shared experience of the performance. Thus I made the decision to adopt a morally ethical stance and explore not only my interpretations



based on the dramatic paradigm but my intuitive feelings and reactions to the reading of the texts and the experience as the “native ethnographer”.

I/eye assumed that our shared Trinidadian dialect and knowledge of the geographic space might have influenced the text of the performer’s narrative<sup>12</sup> and our social interaction. I sensed that Jerry was also immediately at ease in the setting because of my long term relationship with the person who introduced me to him and the physical space in which the interview was taking place. He confidently referred to places like the savannah<sup>13</sup> where I/eye knew all the competitions took place, and the local names of tools like the pig foot. Because we were both Trinidadian, Jerry was certain that I/eye knew a cut tail was a whipping and a pig foot was a crow bar. He confirmed this by his use of the words “of course” throughout the interview suggesting that I/eye already knew what he meant and that there was a shared understanding of the discourse. Our bodies were therefore bonded by common experiences and this made the performance one that could be shared. At the same time, I realized that it could have clouded my valuing of the act and its significance in terms of Carnival mas’ making and the situated actions.

Jerry appeared to be the all knowing subject. He shifted the center from himself to the scene and then back to himself. The romantic ending of the story made it acceptable to an audience. He recognized a flaw in the story, returned to it and suggested that the action of breaking down one’s house and walking away was impractical now. “I guess”, he added. What about the action of the mas’ maker makes the main character heroic? Why would the community of mas’ makers hold on and value this storied event? The audience needed to be like ‘me’ the listener to appreciate the significance of the act. And Jerry recognizing the nature of the audience inserted a

mini narrative that provided the assurance that the audience was able to make meaning of the story. My nativeness was indeed sufficient qualification and thus he was comfortable shifting the narrative between himself and his experiences of mas' making.

Jerry told a story about someone for whom he was making a miniature costume that he was sending out of the country. He was amazed that the person did not understand how to transform the miniature to the real thing. I/eye laughed nervously. His response was: "You see intuitively, you know how to make it." I/eye was not so sure I/eye knew but did not risk displaying my ignorance. At the same time, I/eye did not feel inclined to interrupt the story to ask Jerry what those things meant. In spite of the fact that my training taught me to use prompts for clarification, somehow it did not seem appropriate and so I/eye resisted. I was a silent performer who believed that listening in itself was performance. Moreover I/eye was afraid he would think: "What kind of Trinidadian are you if you don't know those things"? Consequently, I/eye allowed Jerry to tell his story uninterrupted. (Beck, 1980, p. 419) described this communal art of story-telling that lacked audience participation as being more "European" than "African". How much had my Euro-American training affected my ability to respond instinctively and intuitively? In the Caribbean the traditional story-telling involved audience participation either in the form of song or questions or additions to the story. I/eye interpreted the event differently. I/eye saw the stage as belonging to the narrator whose audience was one female character. And, oh how he strutted! I/eye participated in the telling by nodding my head, chuckling in between, and attending as fully as I/eye could while ensuring that the tape recorder was still functioning. But, the thoughts and knowledge (s) about methodology and inter-view behavior in particular were

authoring my actions and contributing to the ongoing tensions I experienced as a Caribbean woman and a US trained scholar/researcher. “Crick”? “Crack”!

### ***An addendum:***

I/eye was amazed! Jerry was in control and without any hesitation or prompting from me, he proceeded to add another story. He continued.....

*And to further carry that story four years ago doing some work with Minshall<sup>14</sup> mas' camp I went to get ice by the ice factory. I bought about four bags of ice. A little guy came in with one of those hand trucks and he looking to hustle money and thing. He say, “let mih help you nah”.. I say, “No problem”. So in going back to my mas' camp in Wood brook he told me that he was Errol Payne's nephew and the jewel peacock was a broach that he found and that he gave to Errol Payne to make the mas'. I found that quite interesting. Nothing is coincidental. (Interview, 17 February 2005)*

### ***In between meaning-making***

The narrative could be constructed as a “realist tale” (Van Maanen, 1988) because of my insertion of the extended verbatim transcribed text in the paper. Or it could be interpreted that I/eye was trying to represent as closely as possible the spoken words to assure the reader of the authenticity. However, my interest was not just in Jerry as a “knowing subject” (Prior, 2004) but in analyzing how the performance affected my understanding and the meaning I/eye made of the cultural practice. As the ethnographer, I/eye assumed the stance of learner. I/eye was comfortable with Jerry assuming the role of narrator/griot/teacher. My verbal silences after one attempt at asking for clarification on what was a steel band and feeling quite foolish because I/eye already had knowledge of that particular concept forced me to allow the narrator full rein of the

conversation. I/eye could see now that the manner in which the story-telling proceeded was directly linked to how we co-constructed the interview process.

These stories served as a touchstone, which according to Banks-Wallace (2002, p. 411), “remind people of a shared heritage and /or past.” I/eye began to feel that I/eye was participating in something bigger than mas’ making and costuming. Jerry used his memory of the event to re-create a narrative that allowed me to re-experience it and to share in this heritage. Yet, I found myself asking: “Was this narrative a mythical legend, folk tale, true story, or local knowledge?” I/eye felt that I/eye needed to respect the narrator who was doing me a service by sharing his personal experiences as a mas’ maker.

As a native ethnographer and a US scholar there were my preconceptions and prejudices based on my fore-knowledge. These preconceptions were not to be viewed negatively. According to Gadamer (1979), Gertz, (1973), Ricoeur (1981) and others, they are what make understanding in the first place. However the adoption of hermeneutic phenomenology as explored by Ricoeur advised that there was a need to distance from the ‘lived experience’ and not content to be just an insider. This performance is an attempt to interrupt the “relation of belonging in order to signify it” (Ricoeur, 1981. p. 112). Throughout the narrative event, there is the attempt to combine distancing and belonging with the dialectical dialogue between understanding, explanation, and meaning making.

Throughout the story-telling I/eye found myself caught in-between feelings of ease and uneasiness. I felt uneasy when I judged Jerry forced me to provide answers to questions that I

deemed unethical. However his use of names of places and local terms with which I was familiar and his easy way of conversing during the inter-view provided me with the feelings of ease. As a the native 'I' knew and did not know this story. The knowing, based on the story in this context and the frames the ethnographer/researcher appended, changed. Jerry's description of his lived experience that the ethnographer/researcher me heard, read, transcribed and experienced made the story assume a different quality.

As narrator/griot Jerry held the stage. In true Caribbean story-telling style, he tried to involve me in the story through questions. He asked my opinion about a mas' maker whose work was gaining the attention of the media. I/eye was hesitant to provide a response. I/eye silently cringed. I/eye felt I/eye would betray the other mas' maker by giving an opinion. Suddenly I/eye felt vulnerable, exposed, and scared. Jerry insisted and I/eye gave my story about my interactions in the field and my insider knowledge of the mas' makers work. Jerry assumed we were friends chatting and therefore I/eye was free to share. On the other hand, I/eye was wearing my ethnographer/researcher's hat and felt that I/eye needed to be ethically responsible and not talk about other participants in my study.

I/eye remember leaving the two-hour long interview thinking that I knew much more about the mas' maker's life history and a cultural practice that was important and significant to mas' making. Yet, the ethnographer/researcher failed to make them a significant part of the dissertation paper. However, they served as a scaffold for my interpretation and understanding of yet another 'peacock story' that another actor in the field shared with me on a subsequent occasion.

“Crick”? “Crack”!

## ***25 February 2005***

Larry was my mentor/teacher and the gate keeper. He taught mas’ making at the local university and worked in several mas’ camps. He provided me with access to many sites in the field and introduced me to everyone he thought could teach me about mas’ making. He took me everywhere he judged I/eye needed to go to see mas’ making in process. When he told me we were leaving “just now” it meant maybe in the next four or five hours. As the apprentice/novice mas’ maker/ethnographer, I/eye waited, followed his advice, and listened to his stories. As a Caribbean woman whose great-grandmother’s stories taught her many of life’s lessons, I/eye was very aware of the important role that story-telling played in our cultural context. I/eye also knew that personal experiences in the form of narratives were very integral to the research methodology that framed the ethnographic study (Riessman, 1993). There was acceptance of this way of knowing as a legitimate knowledge.

Larry knew that mas’ camps were not the only sites I/eye needed to see and so he took me to other cultural events like the Hosein<sup>15</sup> festival in St. James. I/eye drove along the Eastern Main Road that connected the eastern part of the country to the west and Larry told me stories. Our ongoing never ending conversations reflected the ease and comfort of the relationship that was very different from the one I/eye had with Jerry. It was not until my second meeting with Jerry that I/eye could enter into this kind of easy going conversation-like interviews that I/eye had with Larry. At the same time, I/eye never wanted to miss out on Larry’s story-telling. He never missed an opportunity to teach me a lesson. He was indeed the “griot personified” and I/eye tried to be a listener and student. My digital recorder was always set to go when we met each other.

Little did I/eye realize that the knowledge I/eye gained was not simply for the dissertation but that one day Larry would have an opportunity to test my knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the things he was doing and teaching me.

In between our conversation about which was the best route we should take and where we would park, Larry told me a story about an occasion when he found himself making a costume in an abandoned gas station. It was the only place that could accommodate the size of the costume. He then inquired whether I/eye knew the peacock story. I/eye did but I/eye urged him to tell me the story. Larry continued:

*.....The old story about, I think it was Errol Payne and his costume.*

*He finished the whole costume and then they realize they made it inside the house and they couldn't get it outside and they had to break down the walls.*

*So I think there is that spontaneity.*

*So sometimes certain problems that you think in the planning stage you could solve.*

*It is only when you come to deal with the real thing that you realize that there are things that still have not been considered.* (Informal conversation, 25 February

2005)

And Larry continued to tell me other stories while I/eye drove to our destination. There was never a dull moment with Larry.

### ***In-between meaning-making***

Larry's story was short and to the point. With these few lines, Larry was able to supply me with act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. The information I/eye received from Larry was always in

an informal conversations and ongoing. There was no formal setting in which we sat down and I/eye asked him questions. On the contrary, it was always in casual conversations that the stories would come up and we would chat about issues surrounding mas' making. Larry was one of my first teachers in the field and we worked together in the mas' camps and so our relationship was quite different from the one with Jerry. Hence, he did not have the need to provide me with as much detail and background about himself or the context. His purpose was to provide me with material that would help me understand mas' making culture [culture as a verb]. His attempt at evaluating was much more pointed. This narration made me less resistant to characterizing the mas' maker because I/eye now felt that I/eye had learned much more about one of the major practices involved in mas' making.

These stories were helping me to explore practices associated with mas' making. I/eye learned about the importance of flexibility, spontaneity, and problem-solving in mas' making. These were entirely different from the traditional ways that I/eye knew as an educator in the "formal" school system. But, to critique these ways of knowing would have defeated the reason I/eye was in the field and to impose another value system on the activities. I/eye was able to make the links between some of the things I/eye saw happening when I/eye worked and observed in the mas' camp and the story that Larry was telling me about the "jeweled peacock" costume. I/eye finally realized that the social interactions in the mas' camps and the semi-formal interview settings were allowing me to piece together ideas about mas' making practices. Holistic as a concept that referred to ethnography made more sense to a becoming ethnographer.



The major theme in these stories of the experience of mas' making was the value of the costume to the mas' maker. These stories I/eye judged would be told over and over, again and again in informal conversations around the tables and were meant to emphasize that there was nothing more important than the mas' costume. Ironically, I/eye knew from experience as a "spect-actor"(Boal, 1985 ) one who by looking on was also participating, that this work of art unfortunately lost some of its value for the onlooker at the end of the parade on Carnival Tuesday. Nevertheless, prior to the celebration and until it was paraded, nothing was more important to the mas' maker who spent hours, weeks, months, days, and nights making the in spaces that might be too small to allow it to come outside for viewing but which allowed it to maintain its magic and spirit of awesomeness that the on-looker, "spec-actor" embodied when it came out of hiding.

### ***Voice Over***

And so the 'peacock story' data were archived and left them alone. They came to life again when reference was made to them during the dissertation defense. The story or maybe the telling so impacted the listener, my sistah doctor, that she made the comment referred to earlier in the performance. Little did the researcher-ethnographer know that this would not be the end of the peacock stories!

### ***March 2008***

I/eye returned "home" from my second field visit. I/eye felt exhilarated and alive as I/eye usually do after a visit. The gleam in my eyes and the skip and jump in my step supported the internal feelings. The best medicine was going back to the place that I/eye was supposed to "know" best but realized I/eye did not know. I/eye continued to be a semi-"professional stranger" (Agar,

1996). I/eye fully understood the rationale behind my committee member's advice that I/eye do this as often as possible. I/eye sat at my desk and reviewed my field notes and photographs and listened to the audio taped interviews. The photograph of the 2008 Carnival king costume titled "Obsession" [See Figure 1] in which with mas' makers were adding the finishing touches in the Queen's Park Savannah tugged at my heart strings. The visual served to bring back memories. This costume was part of an epiphanic moment when I/eye was able to experience the "jeweled peacock" stories. "

Insert Figure 1: Roland St. George 2008 Carnival King Costume (photograph courtesy author)  
"Crick"? "Crack"!

### ***January, 2008: My peacock story***

Three years after the dissertation process, January 2008, I/eye entered the field again. Larry invited me to meet with him at a mas' camp in downtown Port of Spain on Henry Street in the heart of the city. I/eye slowly made my way through the narrow gateway and were surprised at the size of the building that was lodged at the back. It was large enough to house a 40 feet tall costume. The mas' makers were busy at work on top of the scaffold completing the decorations on the costumed.

As usual I/eye adopted the roles of apprentice, volunteer worker, learner, and ethnographer. I/eye began to assist in the decoration of another king costume that was one-tenth the size of the one that confronted me when I/eye entered the building. As I/eye worked, I/eye observed and was amazed at the amount of work that still needed to be done on costumes that were to be judged in two days' time in the savannah. I/eye remembered my experience in the mas' camps three years ago and decided that it would be another long night. Larry soon assumed his role of

teacher/mentor and asked me what mythical/legend I/eye had observed. I/eye had no answer. He then challenged me to provide him with an answer before the evening was over. I/eye feared that I/eye would be there all night before I/eye could find an answer. I/eye did not want to fail the test and so began paying closer observation to what was happening around me in the mas' camp.

When I/eye stopped thinking about it the answer came. "My my, the 'jeweled peacock' again"! I/eye approached him and quietly asked, "How are they getting this costume out of here"? Larry smiled and said, "Yes, you got it right. Wait and you will see."

Larry looked pleased and proud. He had done a good job of teaching me about one of the legends of mas' making via the story-telling and I/eye was a good student. It was now more than a story it was "mystory". It was a "real event" for me. Larry and Jerry passed the story on to me and so I/eye could understand and appreciate what I/eye was seeing and experiencing and pass it on to my readers/listeners. Was this legend, myth, or reality? I/eye again questioned myself.

It was nearing midnight when I/eye heard the sound of walls being knocked down, concrete falling, shovels filling up and emptying. I/eye could not believe it. Larry glanced at me and I/eye looked at him in utter disbelief. This was not coincidental as Jerry had warned me. I/eye now had my own jewel peacock story. A building that was obviously hundreds of years old was being knocked down to let the costume out. I/eye was still in disbelief and wondering if it was a dream or something. "*Crick*"? "*Crack*"!

### ***Temporary conclusion of meaning-making***

I/eye now had my own ‘jeweled peacock’ experience and story that I/eye could relate to and connect to those of the actors in my dissertation. I/eye could now create a personal narrative that was integral to my understanding of the mas’ making practices. However, instead of creating a duality I/eye was desirous of combining aspects of evocative and analytic auto ethnography with my understanding of performance ethnography cognizant of the limitations and advantages of both genres (Anderson, 2006). My scripted performance of the event worked to frame the meaning I/eye could now make of my actors’ stories.

In 2008 the art form has evolved and mas’ makers in other camps are now designing and building costumes that could be put together on the spot in the savannah. But the legend of constructing inside and then breaking down the building to bring it out still existed. For some critics that might seem “backward” but it is a legend that still exists.

The analysis of these performances via the stories allowed me to reflect on the embodied experiences and to see how the legend lived on and informed the cultural practices of the community. My jeweled peacock story was based on a personal experience. But, had I/eye not received, attended to, and represented the stories of my actors, it would never have been as meaningful, useful, and important to my understanding of what it means to be a mas’ maker.

In this paper I/eye returned to the data and in particular the stories about the jeweled peacock and made them text. I/eye realized that these “stories” facilitated my learning process and my understandings of cultural practices and knowledge (s) that were being produced and producing

the men and women in this non school context—Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival mas’ camp. There was a collapsing of the knower and the known. I/eye accepted the stories as much more than “partial truths” (Clifford, 1986) because of the number of times they were told to me.

But, as one of my committee members assured me, “The dissertation does not end with the defense” (Preissle, personal communication 2005). And so, three years later when I/eye returned to the research site, the story of the peacock again reared its head and I/eye returned to my ‘sistah’s’ questions. The stories of the peacock that mas’ makers shared with me became not just a cognitive event (Neisser, 1976) but a performance that would inform my own understanding of future events and the process of mas’ making. The ethnographic text might be constructed as fiction “something made up and fashioned” (Clifford, 1986, p. 6). But as Denzin (1990, p. 201) reminded, “It does not mean falsehood or something opposed to truth.” Instead the experience placed me in the role of preserver of the meaning of these stories and what it meant to the mas’ makers who were using them to teach me. This value the mas’ maker placed on this art that was constructed as popular culture and sometimes looked upon by the tourist/visitor as exotic and awesome was better understood inside these stories. These stories were framing and re-framing the cultural practices about what it meant to be a mas’ maker. The deconstruction of the story/narrative, my re-enactment of the stories via written text, my construction of this paper allowed me to resist and accept categories of mas’ makers and the teaching learning processes involved in mas’ making. I/eye was able to make meaning of what might be otherwise constructed as resistance. Forty years later Errol Payne’s legend still lived on this mas’ camp. The men and women who were there working might never had heard Errol Payne’s story but they were re-enacting my storied experience.

My tendency to want to move away from a “realist tale” Van Maanen (1988) to personal narratives and performances that can be categorized as “fiction” (Denzin, 1990; Richardson, 1988; Visweswaran, 1994) provided the tensions for “*mystory*” (Ulmer, 1989). Additionally, layering the various stories allowed me to add another level of complexity to it.

Finally, in my attempt to resist a “hegemonic system of naturalized realism” (Denzin, 1992, p. 27), I/eye constructed a narrative structure that was organically episodic (Riessman, 1993). It was part of my quest to re-present the intonations and accented voices of the narrators and the rhythm of the stories that got lost in writing the word. I troubled the role of ‘Author’ by assuming multiple roles and including interlocutors and actors in the field as authors in the text. But it is indeed these various roles that allowed me strut across the pages as I/eye re-flected the iridescence and ever changing hues of my feathers and those of the other interlocutors in the story. Indeed it provided an opportunity for me to begin to make that much needed link between ethnography and performance. I/eye discovered how difficult it is to challenge the issue of time and the *other* (Fabian, 1983) and to bring back the body-in-time into ethnographic discourse without assuming the author function.

Indeed Clifford’s (1988) notion of the Caribbean as among other things one that is “rebellious, syncretic, and creative” (p. 15) might account for the experiences, the stories, and my need as a native ethnographer and sometimes displaced academic/scholar to find (Clifford, 1988, p. 6) “an inventive poetics of reality”. Each narrative represented another layer of the story—of reality if it can be called thus. This left each layer open for deconstruction. So as you peel away each layer the more you question what is real and whose story/narrative it is. It belongs to everyone and no

one. The narrative becomes purely fictional and like folklore that usually has no original author, it can be appropriated by anyone in the culture.

The ethnographer/researcher 'I' am tempted to view my experience of this event in a Trinidad Carnival mas' camp as "the process which "presses out" to "an expression" which completes it" (Turner, 1982, p. 13). This paper/narrative event has become the expression. At the same time, the performative 'I' am inclined to believe that "we experience through the body. It is the embodied expression that organizes the experience" (Madison 2005 cited Conquergood, 1982, p. 85). They are both possibilities. Indeed they both contributed to a dialogic performance, which was for me an ethical imperative (Conquergood, 1982) as I engaged in bringing forth *mystory*.

In re-visiting the data, I/eye came to value the power of these narratives about a cultural practice that a becoming native ethnographer had taken for granted.

### ***Epilogue***

The researcher/ethnographer's lack of knowledge of what accounted for her not using the 'peacock stories' differently, pushes her to try to come to know, to learn about, and make meaning of the experience using different frames and a "*mystory*". She was committed to Ulmer's (1989) notion that, "To approach knowledge from the side of not knowing what it is, from the side of one who is learning, not from the that of one who already knows, is **mystory**" (p. 106). The lived peacock story experience became the social reality that pushed the ethnographer/researcher to combine the personal with the imaginative and the intellectual and in so doing open up a space that allowed for the distancing and performance allowed for a revision in the frames used previously in reading/writing the text, and a change in the presentation of the narrative event. The narrator/performer 'I' opened and closed the event using the voice of the

narrator of the last story—a response to mystory. Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews that might tend to appropriate them as “fact”, or “realist stories, but they allowed the ethnographer/researcher me to fuse the voices of the other narrators/story tellers with those of the performer ‘I’ and the narrators of the academic texts. Continuing exploration of how discourse functions, where it is found, and how it is produced allowed the ethnographer researcher to come to know, learn, both perform and trouble her role as Author.

Although these stories were told and experienced at different times during the field working process, they all seem to have some measure of similarity that might make them come to be viewed as “truths”. Their telling seem to function as “truths’ in the community and to teach lessons to those who were coming after. Indeed it is the meaning that I made of the first storied experience and which I transferred to the hearing, listening, viewing, and experiencing of subsequent stories that gave them life, made them lived experiences and pushed me to revisit them and critically evaluate their absence/presence. What ‘I/eye’ the researcher/ethnographer came to know was embedded in a particular context and came out of my interaction and relationship not only with the peacock story tellers but with the theories and approaches who constantly and consistently over time interrupted the dialogue. It is within all of these discourses that the “effects of truth” and not ‘truth’ were produced. A collective authorship that breaks down the idea that writing originated from a single source therefore evolves.

### ***Voice Over***

There is now provisional acceptance of the closing response as one of the multiple meanings that could be made of ‘peacock stories’ and leave it to the readers to make their own meanings.....



*This ritual house breaking in the service of the art is the story here. This is the measure of how far man will go to bring the mas' to the street. Have nothing to do with winning. They just want people to see. The chump change they give the winners can't compensate. For the many people and many nights, people wuking. The costume not always ending up in the museum (Email communication, 22 March 2008)*

“Crick?” “Crack!”

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Figure 1: Obsession



## Author's Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> A *mystory* according to Ulmer (1989) is “always specific to its composer...[it] brings into relation your experience with three levels of discourse—personal (autobiography), popular (community stories, oral history or popular culture), expert (disciplines of knowledge)” (pp. vii, 209)."

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<sup>2</sup> *“Crick”? “Crack”!* There is much debate about the distinction between oral and written tradition. However, in keeping with the oral tradition that demands “not only the griot but the audience to complete the community” (Kamu Braithwaite, 1984: 18), I/eye invite the reader via my traditional story-telling call and response: [*“Crick?” “Crack”!*] to participate in the meaning making process.

<sup>3</sup> Schechner (1998) a known Performance Theory scholar assured me that, “Any event, action, item, or behavior may be examined “as” performance. Approaching phenomena as performance has certain advantages. One can consider things as provisional, in-process, existing and changing over time, in rehearsal, as it were” (p. 361). It is within this discourse on performance that I situate the paper that is being viewed as a performance.

<sup>4</sup> This thinking is informed by Derrida’s (2003) theory of the sign and denotes “writing as interplay of presence and absence in that “signs represent the present in its absence” (p. 229).

<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to avoid the duality and to show the delicate relationship between the performative agent and the manifestation of the performance the Author/narrator/director made the decision to replace the first person pronoun I with the subject word I/eye.

<sup>6</sup> Ricoeur’s (1991) stated that “As a linguistic unit, text is, on the one hand, an expansion of the first unit of present meaning which is the sentence. On the other hand, it contributes to the principle of trans-sentential organization that is exploited by the act of story telling in all its forms” (p. 3).

<sup>7</sup> The griot is a very important person that comes out of the traditional African society. This man or woman is the one who kept the stories and who was responsible for ensuring that traditions of the past were passed on to present generations. He or she therefore became the resident historians and educators. I/eye/therefore respectfully use the term because I/eye viewed the persons from whom I/eye/EYE was learning via these stories as the griots of the community. I/eye/ too as the one passing on the stories via the ethnography become a griot.

Foucault’s (1977) phrasing of the concept “author-function” served to “revitalize the debate surrounding the subject, by situating the subject, as a fluid function, within the space cleared by archaeology” (p. 125) and therefore seemed most appropriate for this discussion.

<sup>8</sup> In keeping with Deleuze and Gutarri (1987/1980) I have adopted the notion of becoming as it allows for the collapse of the distinction between past, present, and future and opt instead for the simultaneity of becoming.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault (1977) in his text “What is an author?” raises some important issues about the relationship between the author and the text. He makes the case for a “singular relationship between an author and text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it” (p. 115). Although with the introduction of electronic text and hyper media and the inclusion of personal narratives in some text there is less disembodiment of the author, the print media which is the more prolific and “highly valued” medium of scholarly publication still leaves Foucault’s question valid.

<sup>10</sup> Local is used here to refer to The Caribbean and in particular Trinidad and Tobago where I was born, worked, and studied for 50 years before migrating to the US and becoming a citizen.

<sup>11</sup> I/eye opted for a pseudonym because of the liberty I/eye/ took to use a snippet of the text and the liberty I/eye took to deconstruct the narrative instead of presenting an entire realist tale.

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<sup>12</sup> I/eye/ identify the narrative as text and not Jerry's experience because of the process through which it has gone— audio taping, listening, transcribing, and pulling into this paper. Denzin's (1990) claim that there is no firm dividing line between the text, the author, and the subject influenced much of my attitude towards the narrative brought forth

<sup>13</sup> The Queens Park Savannah, located in the middle of Port of Spain, is considered the largest roundabout in the world. This circular grass field, that occupies 81 hectares of space, was originally the designated space for horseracing, football, and cricket. Trinidadians use this open space to fly kites and to view the annual Independence Day parades. Workers are employed annually to build a large stage where the competitions take place and stands to the side of the stage for the spectators.

<sup>14</sup> Minshall is another mas' designer whose popularity spreads internationally and whose work with the Calaloo Company of Trinidad and Tobago for the various Olympic openings placed Carnival mas' art and the country on the world map. Of course my knowledge of Minshall and his work prevented me from prompting Jerry for clarification and further explanation.

<sup>15</sup> Trinidad's Hosay (Hosein, the Shia Muslim festival), is an annual event in which elaborately decorated tadjahs (tombs) are paraded over four days and nights