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# Too Fast: Coloniality and Time in Wylers of St. Kitts and Nevis

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# Too Fast: Coloniality and Time in Wylers of St. Kitts and Nevis

## **Abstract**

Wylers, the popular music most strongly associated with the annual Christmas carnival in St. Kitts and Nevis, is generally regarded as "too fast." And yet, while wylers is broadly understood as "too fast," metric analysis of representative songs does not indicate a major difference in tempo or beats per minute between wylers and other, widely accepted, popular Caribbean music such as Trinidadian Power soca or Dominican bouyon. Why, then, is wylers perceived as "too fast"? What is at stake in making this claim—that is, too fast for whom or for what? This dissertation examines the varied and highly divergent answers that emerge in response to these questions. Ultimately, a case is made for understanding the rhetoric surrounding wylers as indicative of the strong legacy of colonialism—coloniality—that informs the ways people perceive certain types of sounds and movements. This project, then, illustrates the presence of historically contextual, and ethically grounded conceptions of tempo and "fastness" even in the postcolonial moment. I argue that being, sounding, and moving "too fast" in St. Kitts and Nevis are the local, temporal, sonic, and embodied deployments of decolonial aesthetics as a response to and rejection of colonial aesthetics as an upholding tenant of coloniality. Following the contours of local discourse in St. Kitts and Nevis, I deploy the colloquial, Kittitian-Nevisian Creole definitions of the word "fast" and the phrase "too fast" as thematic guides in order to examine 1.) Notions of unauthorized musicianship and untimely musicality and 2.) Black female performances of sexuality and citizenship. Through use of ethnographic and historical methodologies, I argue that unconventional modes of musicianship and unrespectable performances of female sexual expression are "too fast" in their relationship to colonial mores of respectability. I consider how appeals to and valuations of manners of being, sounding, and moving "too fast" carve out aesthetic and ontological space for decolonial possibility.

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TOO FAST: COLONIALITY AND TIME IN WYLERS OF ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

Jessica Swanston Baker

A DISSERTATION

in

Music

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Supervisor of Dissertation

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TOO FAST: COLONIALITY AND TIME IN WYLLERS OF ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

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For Santoy and Zora

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## ABSTRACT

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Jessica Swanston Baker

Timothy Rommen

Wyllers, the popular music most strongly associated with the annual Christmas carnival in St. Kitts and Nevis, is generally regarded as “too fast.” And yet, while wyllers is broadly understood as “too fast,” metric analysis of representative songs does not indicate a major difference in tempo or beats per minute between wyllers and other, widely accepted, popular Caribbean music such as Trinidadian Power soca or Dominican *bouyon*. Why, then, is wyllers perceived as “too fast?” What is at stake in making this claim—that is, too fast for whom or for what? This dissertation examines the varied and highly divergent answers that emerge in response to these questions. Ultimately, a case is made for understanding the rhetoric surrounding *wyllers* as indicative of the strong legacy of colonialism—coloniality—that informs the ways people perceive certain types of sounds and movements. This project, then, illustrates the presence of historically contextual, and ethically grounded conceptions of tempo and “fastness” even in the postcolonial moment. I argue that being, sounding, and moving “too fast” in St. Kitts and Nevis are the local, temporal, sonic, and embodied deployments of decolonial aesthetics as a response to and rejection of colonial aesthetics as an upholding tenant of coloniality.

Following the contours of local discourse in St. Kitts and Nevis, I deploy the colloquial, Kittitian-Nevisian Creole definitions of the word “fast” and the phrase “too fast” as thematic guides in order to examine 1.) Notions of unauthorized musicianship and untimely musicality and 2.) Black female performances of sexuality and citizenship. Through use of ethnographic and historical methodologies, I argue that unconventional modes of musicianship and unrespectable performances of female sexual expression are “too fast” in their relationship to colonial mores of respectability. I consider how appeals to and valuations of manners of being, sounding, and moving “too fast” carve out aesthetic and ontological space for decolonial possibility.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	<b>IV</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</b> .....	<b>XII</b>
<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>XIV</b>
A Note on St. Kitts and Nevis: Two Islands Under One Flag .....	xx
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Colonial History and Christmas Sports .....	4
Christmas Sports in St. Kitts-Nevis .....	7
The Decline of Christmas Sports Traditions .....	17
Tempo as Innovation .....	21
A Different Beat: Wylers vs. Soca.....	25
Jouvert 2012-13.....	28
Historicizing “Wylers”: The Online Archive .....	31
Innovation and Tempo in Wylers.....	34
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>50</b>
Fastness In Comparison .....	55
Decoloniality and Tempo: Dewesternizing Time .....	58
Time, Coloniality and the West [Indies] .....	62
The History of Decorum and Cultural Binaries .....	64
Respectability in the British Caribbean Colonies .....	68

Nonsense and Being Fast in The Eastern Caribbean .....	71
Too Fast in St. Kitts and Nevis.....	76
Definitions of “Too Fast” .....	80
Decoloniality as A Frame: Decolonial AestheSis .....	88
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>92</b>
Authorized Musicianship and Coloniality.....	99
Valentine Morris .....	100
David Freeman .....	103
Colonial Education and Postcolonial Reform.....	108
The Logic of Coloniality and the Untimely.....	112
Untimely Participation and Decolonial AestheSis .....	117
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>129</b>
Respectability from Post-Emancipation to Post-Colonial.....	135
Women and The Rhetoric of Fastness.....	139
Women and Oppositional Politics.....	144
The Toon Center and the Rhetoric of Delinquent Women.....	147
The History of Christmastime ‘Cultural’ Traditions.....	153
National Carnival Queen Competition 2012-13 .....	158
Conclusion.....	163
<b>CHAPTER FIVE.....</b>	<b>167</b>
Carnival 2013-14 International Night .....	170
Migration and Benevolent Associations.....	174
Cool Sessions Brass in New York City .....	184
A Boat Ride Dance in Toronto.....	188
Nationalism and Internationalism .....	196



Conclusion.....	197
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>201</b>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Transcription of Big Drum “Quadrille” .....	11
Figure 2 Masquerade in Basseterre, St. Kitts circa 1920. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives .....	17
Figure 3 Ellie Matt and The G.I’s Brass Band circa 1977. Courtesy of the St. Kitts-Nevis Archives .....	24
Figure 4 Coca Cola Coronets Steel Orchestra at Carnival 1975-76. Photo by Joe Pane....	25
Figure 5 Transcription of Grand Masters Band 2014 "Shake Your Bumpa" chorus.....	44
Figure 6 A Big Drum band and masquerade troupe perform for tourists at Port Zante December 2010. Photo by author. ....	45
Figure 7 “Mention,” Lead singer of The Nu Vybes Band at Carnival 2010-11. Photo by author. ....	46
Figure 8 Women dancing together during carnival 2010-11. Photo by author.....	87
Figure 9 Valentine Morris (left) with friends and handmade steel pans circa 1950. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives .....	101
Figure 10 David Freeman with Fife in his front garden. Photo by author. ....	105
Figure 11 Onlookers and the Queen during her visit to St. Kitts, 1966. Courtesy of the St. Kitts-Nevis Archives. ....	130
Figure 12 Girls lining the path in Charlestown, Nevis for the Queen’s arrival, 1966. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives .....	131
Figure 13 “Is This What We Encourage?” .....	148
Figure 14. “Parenting Standards Out the Window” .....	151
Figure 15 Judy Mestier (left), St. Kitts 1957, First winner of Carnival Queen title. Courtesy of St. Kitts-Nevis Archives.....	157
Figure 16 Irvinsia Warner, 2012-2013 National Carnival Queen Competition. Photo by author. ....	162
Figure 17 “International Night” Toon Center cartoon.....	174
Figure 18 “The Voice of Nevis” Front (1977) .....	178
Figure 19 “The Voice of Nevis” Back (1977).....	178
Figure 20 KABA Pageant Program (1995).....	182

Figure 21 Alumni group Independence celebration program(2014) .....	182
Figure 22 Cricket Club Gala Program (2001).....	183
Figure 23 Independence Dance Flyer.....	185
Figure 24 Cool Sessions Brass Instrumentalists.....	187
Figure 25 Cool Sessions Brass Lead Singer, Tishelle Knight (center).....	188

## PREFACE

With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, in the spring of 1962 famed folklorist Alan Lomax set out on yet another of his many field trips with the intention of recording the vast and interconnected types of musical expression in the Caribbean. Lomax, having traveled to this part of the world before, felt strongly about the potential in combining political powers in the region in order to create a West Indian Federation, and he believed that by showcasing the similarities between and uniqueness of Caribbean music, he would further the cause championed by those supporting the federated, and thus governmentally unified Caribbean. Despite the fact that the West Indies Federation only lasted from 1958 until 1962, meaning it had dissolved during Lomax's trip to the Caribbean, the recordings are arguably the most extensive and comprehensive set of field recordings to come out of that region, with recordings from twelve different islands, including Anguilla, St. Barthelemey, Carriacou, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Kitts and Nevis.

During the summer of that same year, folklorist Roger D. Abrahams, with funding from The University of Texas, was also conducting research in St. Kitts-Nevis. Abrahams spent one week of a longer fieldwork trip recording local musical and dramatic performances alongside Lomax. Abrahams' main focus was on the gamut of expressive forms in St. Kitts-Nevis, including games, speeches, jokes and riddles, as well as different types of functional and more popular songs. In the process of expanding his research on male performance traditions in Afro-America, Abrahams was largely interested in comparing forms and styles of performance with those he encountered in his hometown of Philadelphia. Despite their complementary aims, Lomax and

Abrahams' working together did present its own set up problems, especially with regards to their approaches to soliciting performances. As Abrahams describes it,

The differences between Alan's technique of eliciting performances and mine also were unsettling . . . I was used to bringing with me the kinds of provisions that Nevisians like but often could not afford: sardines and other canned goods, refined sugar and flour. After the Lomaxes left, however, field work became that much more difficult; each session had to involve a discussion of why I was not able to pay cash."<sup>1</sup>

Despite these conflicts, Lomax and Abrahams' combined efforts in St. Kitts and Nevis resulted in more than 60 hours of recorded sound and hundreds of photographs. Copies of these recordings, as well as relevant field notes, were both deposited in the University of the West Indies, and brought back to New York City with Lomax.

After becoming the founding director of The University of Pennsylvania's Center for Folklore and Ethnography, Abrahams' field notes and some recordings were deposited into the archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. In the spring of 2010 during my first year of graduate school, I spent several hours digging through the un-cataloged piles of Abrahams' Caribbean field notes. In one of the clumsily packed boxes, in the upper right-hand corner of the last page of one of his field journals from June of 1962, was a note that read, "Santoy- Sardines." As exciting as it was to see my grandfather, Simeon "Santoy" Swanston's name amidst such important documents, it was not necessarily surprising. My searching through those boxes was one small part of my father's decade-long project to recover any tangible part of his father's legacy. This project started, in earnest, in response to the 2005 official repatriation of the 1962 Alan Lomax and Roger Abrahams Gingerland, Nevis field recordings.

As was customary until quite recently, while copies of Lomax and Abrahams' field recordings were deposited into institutional libraries and archives, those recordings were

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Abrahams. Liner notes. *Caribbean Voyage: Nevis and St. Kitts Tea Meetings, Christmas Sports and The Moonlight Night*. (Rounder Records, 2002. CD).

available primarily to researchers and academics. Most importantly, of course, the recordings were only available to those who knew they even existed. However, between 1999 and 2001, seventeen CDs of various performances from the twelve islands Lomax visited during his 1962 trip were curated as part of a world music series of ethnographic recordings through Rounder Records. *Caribbean Voyage: Nevis and St. Kitts Tea Meetings, Christmas Sports and The Moonlight Night* was one album from that collection. These CDs were compiled by the Association of Cultural Equity (ACE), which was founded by Alan Lomax in 1983 to “stimulate cultural equity through preservation, research, and dissemination of the world's traditional music, and to reconnect people and communities with their creative heritage.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, after spending three years digitizing the complete collection of Lomax’s Caribbean research, and in collaboration with the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR) of Columbia College Chicago, ACE pioneered an effort to repatriate copies of the original recordings to preservation societies and archives on the Eastern Caribbean islands from which the recordings came.<sup>3</sup> The first of these efforts took place in St. Kitts and Nevis where CDs and prints of supporting materials—which included copies of the *Caribbean Voyage* CD and accompanying liner notes-- were deposited in the public archives of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society in Charlestown, Nevis.

My interest in the music of St. Kitts and Nevis is tied directly to Santoy, who was featured prominently on the St. Kitts-Nevis *Caribbean Voyage* collection, singing three of the thirty-one tracks on the album. As a family of lifelong musicians, and children who lost their father a mere year after the songs were recorded, that Santoy—a nickname that

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<sup>2</sup> “Our Mission” Association For Cultural Equity [http://www.culturalequity.org/ace/ce\\_ace\\_index.php](http://www.culturalequity.org/ace/ce_ace_index.php)

<sup>3</sup> Rosita Sands and Bertram Lyons. “A Working Model for Developing and Sustaining Collaborative Relationships Between Archival Repositories in the Caribbean and the United States.” *International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives* (IASA), no 32, January (2009), 26-39.

each of his sons has taken on as their own-- was featured on a public, internationally circulating recording was, on the surface, a source of great pride. Santoy's youngest son, who was living on Nevis at the time, was thrilled to attend the repatriation ceremony held at the Museum of Nevis History. He stood in the presence of several of the performers who were featured in the recordings, and was reminded of the importance of these ethnographic artifacts to the history of St. Kitts and Nevis in a keynote address by the island's premier, Vance Amory. Above all, the ceremony marked the moment when he could access—even *own*—the only existing tangible remnants of his father's short life. Following the historical flows of sounds and goods in and out of the Caribbean, the youngest Santoy garnered copies of the songs, transferred them to a computer, burned several CDs, and photocopied the accompanying liner notes. He later sent them, packed securely in the suitcase of a family friend who would deliver them to his brother, Lincoln, in New York City.

Hearing his father's voice for the first time in 40 years brought tears to Lincoln's eyes—indeed, our entire family was taken aback by how much Santoy's speaking voice, and the cadence of his words sounded stunningly like his eldest son's. These types of emotional reactions and time-spanning family reunions—ones that were made possible only by the repatriation of these recordings—are part of the impetus behind many contemporary repatriation efforts.<sup>4</sup> Sitting in our home in New York in July of 2006 and listening to “A Tragedy At Brimstone Hill” with my father, was a formal introduction of sorts. Santoy begins with a short, spoken introduction: “This is a tragic episode which occurred on Brimstone Hill on Easter Monday, April 10, 1950. It was a real tragic event,

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<sup>4</sup> See Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, “We're all Archivists Now: Towards a more Equitable Ethnomusicology,” *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol. 21, No. 2, August (2012): 125-140.

nevertheless, I made a calypso which I call the Brimstone Hill Tragedy.”<sup>5</sup> I had heard stories of Santoy’s wonderful ability to sing and play a host of instruments. However, I had never encountered any *thing* that he had ever owned, or any physical representation of him except for the assurance from my aunts and uncles that our collective ability to sing well is Santoy’s doing. In an effort to uncover more about Santoy’s legacy, I went to St. Kitts-Nevis to find people who played music with my grandfather.

I was first introduced to “Zack” Nisbett as the unofficial “Doctor of Culture,” when several sources suggested him as someone who would possibly be in possession of a picture or an artifact from Santoy’s short life. Nisbett was the former caretaker of Edgar Challenger, who was a major player in the creation of the St. Kitts Labour party. During his life, Challenger was known to have been a collector of things and papers, especially the rare documents that were being mishandled and thrown away by early twentieth century Kittitian government officials. When Challenger passed away in 2000, Nisbett came into possession of Challenger’s belongings including many rare documents such as birth and death certificates, deeds, and papers pertaining to the sale and purchase of slaves. Since Challenger’s passing, Nisbett has converted the small home in central Basseterre into a museum, archive, and library to allow the public access to these valuable relics.

When I visited Nisbett in July of 2010 he greeted me at this front gate and invited me into the front room of the library. Upon stepping inside the dimly lit house I was taken aback by the sheer amount of *stuff*—things of every sort-- packed into every possible space. Stacks of paper filled cupboards, tabletops and bottoms, and every corner and surface of the three-room house. Nineteenth century undergarments and early

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<sup>5</sup> Santoy. “Brimstone Hill Tragedy,” *Caribbean Voyage: Nevis and St. Kitts Tea Meetings, Christmas Sports and The Moonlight Night*. (Rounder Records, 2002).



twentieth century household items hung on the wall above almanacs and leather bound journals filled with Challenger's personal notes. By the end of my tour, which included a short pass through Nisbett's side yard that was home to a few chickens and an ancient iguana, and a basement space that was dedicated to the display of carnival history, I had seen an incredible array of historical treasures. Zack was not able to locate any one thing in particular given the sheer mass of items surrounding him, but he felt particularly confident that he did not have a picture of my grandfather.

Nisbett, in calling himself the "Doctor of Culture," has had his hands in several projects aimed to preserve local ways on St. Kitts. He holds fife making and playing classes and described to me a guitar and string band class and recital he held a few weeks prior to my arrival. Another project he was involved with, that he thought would interest me, included recording the oral histories of aging musicians. Later that afternoon I accompanied Nisbett as he visited octogenarian and former musician James Phipps, a multi-instrumentalist who enjoyed the height of his music career in the orchestral dance music scene of the 1940s and 1950s. Phipps had fond memories of social dances and musical events sponsored by civic clubs in the 1950s. In sharing his opinions on "music of today," he complained that people "play too fast now." Going further, he shared, "The women dem, they got their skirts on their heads. Disgraceful. And if you go up to these guys and say, 'I don't like that, play something else' they look to pull machete and chop you up!"

I had heard that rhetoric before-- that contemporary music in St. Kitts-Nevis is "too fast." That for Phipps the fast tempo was immediately related to exposed women and violent men was a strikingly common connection made by other people I encountered in St. Kitts-Nevis. Inherent to Phipps' comments are local notions of respectability and intergenerational tension that inform the way people hear, think, and

talk about the past and the present, especially with regards to music. This dissertation, at its heart, is an examination of this “too fast” rhetoric via its relationship to the circulation of local ideas and local music in St. Kitts and Nevis.

### **A Note on St. Kitts and Nevis: Two Islands Under One Flag**

Roger Abrahams, whose work is central to my understanding of the history of Kittitian and Nevisian artistic productions, has described the relationship between St. Kitts and Nevis as “a strange, antagonistic symbiosis.”<sup>6</sup> Much of the character of this relationship can be traced to the earliest days of French and English colonization of those islands, sitting at their closest points, just two and a half miles apart. In 1862, the governor of the Leeward Islands described the relationship between people of St. Kitts and Nevis saying, “A gentleman of Nevis says it is his duty to abhor everything belonging to St. Kitts, which, he adds, is the faith of all true Nevisians.”<sup>7</sup> That in 1883 all of the governing authority of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla was located in St. Kitts was one source of the ongoing friction between the two islands.<sup>8</sup> More recently, tensions came to one of the most explosive heads in their history on August 10, 1998 when a referendum was held in response to Nevis’ governmental desire to secede from St. Kitts and form its own independent country. While this attempt at secession failed, talk of secession and of the presumed inherent and distinct differences between Kittitians and Nevisians are still as prevalent as ever.

Academic attention to these islands, too, has subscribed to the notion that while the two islands are connected by a governmental agreement, the limits of the bounded geographical islands offer a more reasonable context for intellectual inquiry. Much of the

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<sup>6</sup> Abrahams, Liner notes, *Caribbean Voyage*

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Hall, *Five of the Leewards*, Caribbean Universities Press, 1971, 169.

<sup>8</sup> See Vincent Hubbard *A History of St. Kitts*, (Northampton: Interlink Publishing Group, 2002). and Washington Archibald, *The Legacy of Dr. Simeon Daniel*, (2010) for more on this.

social science ethnographic work in those islands has taken place on Nevis, while St. Kitts has received biological, zoological and archeological investigation.<sup>9</sup> Despite the strained political and social history between the islands, they have and continue to share music and dance traditions and, for the purpose of this dissertation, a long colonial history. For this reason, I refer to St. Kitts and Nevis (SKN) and Kittitians-Nevisians (KNs) without alluding to the specificities of each geographical island except where it is integral to the make such a distinction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bonham Richardson's text on migration in St. Kitts and Nevis (1983) is one exception to this rule. Bonham C. Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants: Environment and Human Survival on St. Kitts and Nevis*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). For additional examples of social research on Nevis see Debra Curtis, *Pleasures and Perils* (2009); Richard Frucht, *Emigration, Remittances, and Social Change* (1968); Janet Momsen, *Women and Change in the West Indies* (1993).

<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that at the time of writing, on February 3, 2015, members from three political parties from St. Kitts and Nevis (The People's Action Movement, The Labour Party, and The Concerned Citizen's Movement) signed a "Treaty of National Unity" as a first step toward ending the factionalism and rivalry between the two islands. Where Lomax and Abrahams' work in St. Kitts and Nevis some 50 years ago sought to aid in a unified Caribbean, I offer this project as a similar gesture toward a politically and socially unified Kittitian-Nevisian Federation.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION:**  
**RHYTHM AND TEMPO AS CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION**

The familiar sound of the rolling rhythm of the kettle drum layered on top of the resonant bass of the big drum sounded distant and muffled being pumped through the huge speakers flanking the stage of the 2012-2013 St. Kitts Soca Monarch competition. When the lights went up on the performers, we could see the drummers behind a line of seven masqueraders decked in their colorful clothing, wielding wooden hatchets, and shaking the bright feathers perched on top of their headdresses. Running in between the masqueraders, two young girls dressed in white leotards with colorful skirts stood on either side of stage spinning their arms like windmills over their heads, and two-stepping in time with the steady boom of the bass “bull” drum. These repetitive dance moves were reminiscent of those that typify the “culture” segment of local Caribbean beauty pageants. A man with a big gray beard, a long white lab coat, and an even longer whip in hand, followed behind the drummers. I recognized him as the character of the veterinarian from the “Mansion Bull” skit essential to traditional Christmas Sports celebrations in St. Kitts and Nevis. A woman in a white, skin-tight, bedazzled cat suit and a multicolored, feather headpiece, emerged from the back of the stage. A man in a cape accompanied her as they were announced as “Mr. And Mrs. Carnival.” Suddenly, Ali Dee, the woman in the white bodysuit the previous three minutes of spectacle was meant to introduce, looked to the side of the stage. Her eyes met with one of the audio technicians who were poised to start the backing track of her entry for that year’s “Power Soca” segment of the season’s national soca competition. The song, “Together,” was an ode to

St. Kitts-Nevis carnival that borrowed heavily— lyrically and melodically— from Pat Benatar’s 1984 “We Belong.”<sup>11</sup>

While the two drummers continued to play for the gaggle of dancers and characters on stage, Ali Dee gave the cue, and the track began with slow, on-the-beat hi-hats. For what felt like a split second, the big drum patterns and the hi-hat moved together, but as is characteristic of masquerade music, the big drum and kettle drum continued to get faster and faster during their time on the stage and the two rhythms very quickly became out of sync. With the onstage players and the pre-recorded track competing for space, Ali Dee spoke powerfully into the microphone, “My name is Ali Dee, Party all night, all day. Now for carnival...” In her bottom register, she launched into the opening chant of her song, “jumpin’, jumpin’, jumping, waving, misbehaving, constant wining, non-stop jamming, carnival is time for waving, take a rag” she hesitated briefly, “no, no, no, no!” Sensing the discomfort created by the clashing rhythms, Ali Dee turned to the live drummers and motioned for them to stop playing saying, “ya’ll ease out.” The drummers stopped momentarily as she continued her performance. After a few measures, the drummers gradually joined back in with a more subdued and evenly metered version of their earlier playing.

By the end of the performance, the number of performers had multiplied exponentially such that the entire stage was a sea of movement, and color. Masqueraders were joined by their historical counterparts, the clowns; the man in the coat playing the veterinarian was accompanied by another man in a bull costume, and several women in the glitzy outfits that characterize “playing ‘mas” around the Caribbean were dancing amidst the on-stage crowd alongside veteran Kittitian and Nevisian calypsonians. A man

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<sup>11</sup> Pat Benatar, “We Belong,” by David Eric Lowen and Dan Navarro in *Tropico*, (Chrysalis, 1984).

swinging a lighted torch appeared and performed a short routine during which he attempted to light his own foot on fire. All the while, Ali Dee continued to weave in between the performing revelers, jumping, dancing and chanting, “everybody get wild!” After exiting the stage, Ali Dee was met by a media personality from the St. Kitts National Carnival Committee:

**Interviewer:** How wild! How was that?

**Ali Dee:** Wild! It was exciting. It was full of excitement. I mean, wow! I think I learned to appreciate the culture a bit more after that performance.

**Interviewer:** [One could] recognize some people on stage, which was really exciting because you were just paying tribute to carnival. Tell me about that.

**Ali Dee:** That idea came from thinking back on carnival; how it started and thinking about who are the ones who made it what it is now. Instantly, when you think about carnival you think about Ellie Matt and the GI brass. Now Ellie Matt is not here, so who else closer to him than maybe Socrates or Mixto. So I honored Mixto there and Fonsie who is an old, old musician, and Singing Jackie who is one of the most prominent female calypsonians.

**Interviewer:** So is there any chance for a divorce between you and carnival?<sup>12</sup>

**Ali Dee:** Naw! You crazy? I am a Kittitian by birth. Carnival is in my blood; it can't go.<sup>13</sup>

I start here with Ali Dee's performance because it highlights, in some less-obvious ways, many of the themes that occupy me in this dissertation. Specifically, I see her performance as a representation of the collision of large concepts that characterize much of the conversation surrounding popular music in the Caribbean such as the folk and the popular, and the traditional and the contemporary. Ali Dee's performance exemplified the differences between roles for men and women during carnival and, in the course of

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<sup>12</sup> The interviewer's question may have been in relation to Ali Dee's use of Pat Benatar's, "We Belong" which is a song about a breakup between lovers.

<sup>13</sup> SKN Carnival, "Sugar Mas 41 Ali Dee 'Together' Soca Monarch Power Performance," *YouTube* video, 9:20, December 22, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3nukqtaO9Y>.

doing so, highlighted some of the technical and more rhetorical tensions attendant to the bringing together of digital and acoustic music. Further, that the pre-recorded track, that indexed mid 1980s American pop as well as contemporary, fast-paced Trinidadian power soca, failed to sync properly with the live big drum ensemble—a locally meaningful indicator of SKN’s history of slavery *and* of contemporary nationalism--works as an analogy for the types of social negotiations, especially those prescribed by SKN’s history of colonization. Importantly, these negotiations are often played out musically.

In honoring the history of carnival, Ali Dee’s performance showcased an unusually broad range of Kittitian and Nevisian Christmastime folk traditions. The oldest of these art forms, historically referred to as Christmas Sports, are the centerpiece of rhetorical Kittitian-Nevisian claims to rich and unique cultural productions and a connection to a discernible African past. If Ali Dee’s set was meant to provide an historical overview of KN carnival then it was appropriate for the big drum to start the show. Her performance provides a guide and some imagery with which to think through the salient issues that intersect music performance in SKN, especially with regards to the Christmas carnival. In order to better explain these themes and the connections between them, allow me to present the historical and musical landscape against which Ali Dee’s performance was presented.

### **Colonial History and Christmas Sports**

Music was central to the social lives of Africans in the new world since the very early years of the colonial period. St. Kitts, also known as “The Mother Colony” was the first island in the Caribbean to be colonized by the British in 1623. By 1628, English colonists had set up an additional colony in Nevis. On both islands, African slaves and European (mainly Irish and Scottish) indentured servants made up a sizable portion of the workforce in the early colonial period. A large number of the indentured servants,

who were sentenced to work between two and seven years, were convicted criminals who, instead of serving prison time in Britain, were sent to live and work in the West Indies.<sup>14</sup> These white servants worked alongside and suffered similar treatment as the African slaves and were largely considered part of the same social class.<sup>15</sup> By the 1640s, however, the introduction of sugar (first in Barbados, then St. Kitts, and finally Nevis) precipitated the agricultural and economic shift from provision farming on small, family plots to large plantations. This change, in turn, heralded a shift in the social sphere on the islands. As Karen Fog Olwig notes, during the “latter part of the seventeenth century... the treatment of the two groups changed markedly” as “the servants were gradually moved into a more privileged class of artisans and managers.”<sup>16</sup> African slaves, however, were relegated, even more harshly, to the status of property. Some of the effects of this shift can be traced through the reception of the slaves’ recreational and ritual music practices by the white planter class in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Many of the patterns and types of leisure or “sport” activities of the slaves were developed during the early colonial period when slave populations were smaller and enjoyed some degree of autonomy on Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and certain holidays, especially during the Christmas season.<sup>17</sup> Music and dance, specifically, occupied a fair amount of this brief time away from the fields. Richard Lingon’s report on slave life in Barbados in 1657 describes the musical activities of slaves in the British Caribbean colonies during that time:

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<sup>14</sup> Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.



On Sundayes they rest, and have the whole day at their pleasure; and the most of them use it as a day of rest and pleasure... In the afternoons on Sundayes, they have their musicke, which is of kettle drums, and those of several fifes; on the smallest the best musitian playes; and the other come in as chorasses: The drum, all men know, has but one tone, and therefore a varietie of tunes have little to doe in this musicke; and yet so strangely they varie their time, as tis a pleasure to the most curious ears, and it was to me one of the strangest noyses that ever I heard made of one tone; and if they had the varietie of tune, which gives the greater scope of music, as they have of time, they would doe wonders in that Art . . . Time without tune, is not an eighth part of the Science of musicke.<sup>18</sup>

While Ligon regards the slaves' propensity for drumming and rhythm-heavy music as a strange noise, he does not hint toward these practices' being threatening.

It was not until the latter part of the seventeenth century that laws were enacted that specifically forbade the slaves from making music, particularly through use of percussion. An act of assembly from 1737 states that, "where it is common practice for negroes to meet in great companies on the Sabbath day, feasting, drinking, and gaming" an offender will be "publicly whipt" for beating any "Negro-drum, great or small."<sup>19</sup> The drum, in particular, was at the center of the planter class' fear of rebellion, which almost certainly meant physical danger but also, and perhaps most importantly, the threat of economic and social ruin for the colonists. Analogously, the drum was also at the heart of many of the forms of music and dance— ritual, popular, and folk.

The early interactions between Scotch-Irish indentured servants from the English countryside provided the slaves with a pragmatic context (particular practices of English celebration) for constituting a sense of social life or, as Olwig has suggested, resisting

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados. History of the Island of Barbados.* (London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1657), 45. Olwig (1996) refers to Ligon's reception of the music as "generally positive" and suggests that the implementation of laws that barred such music-making in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries constitute a drastically changed attitude toward slaves' music and dance. I would suggest that Ligon's assessment of the slave music was purely aesthetic and does not offer insight into to the political or social potential of the music and dance practices.

<sup>19</sup> *The Laws of Nevis: From 1681 to 1861* (London, 1862), 131-132. Interestingly, while public recreational drumming was banned in Nevis, the very act of enacting such laws included their being "published in Charlestown by beat of drum." Ibid., 210.

“social death” through music and dance.<sup>20</sup> It is within this context that the types of “traditional”, or what are now called “indigenous” in SKN, forms of music and dance flourished throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That the laws forbidding public drumming did not stifle the development of distinctive music and dance practices amongst the slaves is made evident by their familiar presence at the Soca Monarch competition in 2012 mentioned above. Here I will offer a brief description of these forms.

### **Christmas Sports in St. Kitts-Nevis**

Two different types of ensembles have historically accompanied Christmas Sports in St. Kitts and Nevis: The Big Drum and The String Band. Both of these ensembles and their respective repertoire can be, and historically have been, thought of as “the result of a syncretic coming together of African and European traditions.”<sup>21</sup> Where “the Scottish-Irish brought their countryside amusements with them,” these music and dance practices were adopted, adapted and retained because they were “intelligible and appropriate” in the enduring social context created by and in seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial slavery.<sup>22</sup> The big drum ensemble utilizes a bass drum, a kettledrum<sup>23</sup> and a fife.<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup> This type of roving ensemble finds its roots in the instrumentation of

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<sup>20</sup> Olwig in *Global Culture, Island Identity*, borrows this term from Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, "Public Drama and Common Values on Two Caribbean Islands" in *Anthropological Realities: Readings in the Science of Culture*, Jeanne Guillemin, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1981), 81-82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the while the more rhythmically active drum of a big drum ensemble is typically referred to as a “kettle” drum, in actuality, a snare drum is often used. It is unclear whether there was a switch in instrumentation over the course of history, or if it is another example of the colorful development of Kittitian-Nevisian colloquialisms. Reference is made to this difference in terminology in Jacqueline Cramer-Armony and Joan Robinson, “St. Kitts and Nevis” in Malena Kuss, ed. *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Encyclopedic History Volume 2: Performing the Caribbean Experience*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 414.

<sup>24</sup> These types of big drum ensembles, and the masquerading that it accompanies, are prevalent on many other islands of the eastern Caribbean such as Montserrat and Antigua, see Robert Wyndham Nicholls, and

British military fife-and-drum music. Very little documentation exists pertaining to the musical qualities of big drum music that deviate from summary descriptions that refer to its, “driving rhythm and hot tempo” that is “suggestive of a joie de vivre, a state of mind which is perhaps a fanciful flight out of their usual misery.”<sup>26</sup>

The big drum ensemble most commonly provided the music accompaniment for *masquerades*, and *clowns*. During the masquerade typically young boys and men wear colorful shirts and pants with long, multicolored ribbon sewn around the entire ensemble.<sup>27</sup> Each masquerader wears a mask that has a tall hat portion with peacock feathers that accentuate each dance and movement. Over the course of a performance which includes both traveling through various neighborhoods and stopping occasionally to dance for gatherers, a masquerader performs many steps demonstrating footwork, jumping and laterally shaking his isolated head-- making the feathers and ribbons move in syncopation. The masqueraders usually hold a wooden tomahawk in their left hand and perform dance moves that mimic striking a blow with the weapon. One particular

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John Nunley. *The Jumbies' Playing Ground: Old World Influences on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean* (University of Mississippi Press, 2012). Additionally, It has been noted that in Montserrat the big drum ensemble includes, “a fife, a kettle drum played with two sticks to give an infectious syncopating rhythm, a boom drum, a boom pipe which emits a ‘boom’ sound and a shak-shak or maracas. Howard A. Fergus, *Montserrat: History of a Caribbean Colony* (Macmillan Caribbean, 1994), 242. There is very little extant literature that discusses the music of Christmas carnival celebrations, however, literature and ethnographic experience suggest that Kittitian-Nevisian big drum ensembles do not utilize the boom pipe (baha) or shakers (shak-shak) or maraca. These instruments, however, are typically played in local string bands or scratch bands.

<sup>25</sup> During my fieldwork I also witnessed big drum and masquerade troupes utilize an empty glass bottle as the melodic instrument in lieu of a fife.

<sup>26</sup> Frank L. Mills, Simon B. Jones-Hendrickson, and Bertram Eugene. *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts-Nevis: Our Neglected Cultural Tradition* (F.L. Mills, 1984), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Some women do participate now but it is traditionally a male dominated Christmas sport. On this subject, Kittitian-Nevisian historian Jacqueline Cramer-Armony has said, “Each group is led by a Captain who recruits, organizes and trains the participants in the dance sequences, ensures that costumes are up to standard and that monies collected during the performances are distributed equitably. Once the exclusive domain of men, many of the Masquerade troupes now have a significant proportion of girls and young women.” Jacqueline Carmer-Armony, “St. Kitts Mass and The Spirit of Christmas.” Np. Nd. [www.StKittsHeritage.com](http://www.StKittsHeritage.com) Accessed April 8, 2015

dance, called the “wild dance” entails the masqueraders “explod[ing] into a fierce display of body movements, their crown-like headgear of peacock feather waving vigorously, as they... exhibit a typical African war dance” which occurs, “when the music develops into a fiery tempo.”<sup>28</sup>

Masqueraders generally perform as a group or in short choreographed routines that include some couple and individual dancing. The origin of the prominent tunes is unclear, but descriptions of big drum music have emphasized the importance of intricate rhythms between the interplay of the fife, kettle, and bass drums contributing to the fast tempo of the songs. In this regard, it has been described as a process where “as the tempo of the drum beat develops, with the man on the fife—generally a virtuoso of class— fluting out the traditional ‘balie’ tune; tomahawks are hurled in to the air, to be skillfully caught by the same hand that threw them.”<sup>29</sup>

Any typical big drum performance occurs in two parts: the quadrille and the *wild mas* (or dance). Beginning at a steady, moderate pace, the quadrille features a fluid, melodic improvisation of a basic tune. Accenting the triple eighth note subdivisions played on the kettledrum, the big drum (which is sometimes locally referred to as the bull drum) plays on the beat of each measure. During the quadrille, as the name may suggest, the masquerade dancers perform choreographed dances, sometimes in lines or in couples. The *wild mas* can be understood as a sped-up version of the quadrille where the eighth notes are played increasingly faster on the kettledrum. The fife takes a background role to the percussion instruments during the *wild mas* and typically plays shorter, repetitive, and more rhythmic lines than during the quadrille. During the *wild mas*, the dancers perform larger, faster and more individualized movements that

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<sup>28</sup> Mills, et al., *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts and Nevis*, 51

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

accentuate the shaking of the ribbons and of the feathers on their heads. Both the quadrille and *wild mas* feature rolls, flams, and other drum rudiments that add to the thick rhythmic texture. Big drum music has appeared to remain virtually unchanged since at least the early twentieth century as noted by Abrahams and Lomax with regards to their field recordings. The recorded examples of big drum quadrille from 1962 very closely resemble the examples I witnessed in 2010, 2011, and 2012.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to masquerades, the big drum ensemble also accompanies clowns, “a modern manifestation of the generic traditional masquerades that have appeared in the Eastern Caribbean throughout the years.”<sup>31</sup> These performers wear similarly colorful attire in a “loose, flabby style.”<sup>32</sup> The main differences between clowns and masqueraders is that bells are fastened to clown attire, they carry a cattle-skin whip (locally referred to as a “hunter” as opposed to tomahawks), and there is only one tall feather on top of the conical clown mask.

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<sup>30</sup> See “Quadrille” on *Nevis and St. Kitts Tea Meetings*, 2002

<sup>31</sup> Nicholls and Nunley, *The Jumbies Playing Ground*, 131.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

## Quadrille

Traditional

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Quadrille". The score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes staves for Flute, Snare, and Bass. The Flute part begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 120 and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The Snare and Bass parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), S.D. (Snare Drum), and B.D. (Bass Drum). The Flute part continues with a melodic line, and the S.D. and B.D. parts continue their rhythmic accompaniment. The third system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), S.D., and B.D. The Flute part begins with a *rall.* (rallentando) marking. The S.D. and B.D. parts continue their rhythmic accompaniment. The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 12/8 time signature.

**Figure 1. Transcription of Big Drum “Quadrille”**

The String Band (or scratch band) makes up the other prong of Kittitian-Nevisian folk arts. The common understanding of this type of ensemble in the Eastern Caribbean originates from European instrumentation and genres (such as quadrille music) and African rhythmic styles.<sup>33</sup> Hans Sloane’s travel log from 1707 notes that slaves

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<sup>33</sup> Rebecca S. Miller, *Carriacou String Band Serenade: Performing Identity in the Eastern Caribbean* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 124-5. Karen Fog Olwig has suggested, following the B.A. thesis of Joyah Sutton, that the string band ensemble has Latin American roots and may have found its way back to St. Kitts and Nevis via return migration of men who worked in Panama and Cuba during the beginning of the twentieth century Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity*, 189.

formerly were allowed the use of trumpets after their fashion, and drums made of a piece of a hollow tree, covered on one end with any green skin, and stretched with ghouls or pins. But making use of these in their wars at home in Africa, it was thought too much inviting them to Rebellion, and so they were prohibited by the customs of the island.” He later writes that then-current music making practices included, “several sorts of instruments in imitation of lutes, made of small gourds fitted with necks, string with horse hairs or the peeled stalks of climbing plants or withs.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible to infer that slaves were fashioning stringed instruments not only as an adaptation of European customs but in direct response to the banning of drums. In this context the connection between African rhythmic practices and European instrumentation becomes a bit clearer. This, especially, given that string band music is characterized by its privileging of rhythmic complexity over melodic intricacy, as has been noted by Rebecca Miller.

The string band in its current form and as it has been constituted since the late nineteenth century, makes use of at least one guitar, cuatro, banjo, and mandolin. Additional percussion instruments include the triangle, guiro (or another form of scraper), *shak-shak* (or alternate shaker), and baha or baho— providing the bass for the ensemble.<sup>35</sup> Like the big drum, the bamboo fife (sometimes made of PVC) often provides the melody. The string band traditionally accompanied several types of Christmas Sports, especially those characterized by oratorical demonstrations. One particular Christmas Sport, “Niega Business,” (also referred to as Nega Business and Niega or Nyega business), was, as late as the 1950s, one of the first Christmas Sports traditions to mark the beginning of the season.<sup>36</sup> This type of play with string band interlude is particularly indicative of the extremely localized, and socially embedded nature of music,

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<sup>34</sup> Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (1707): 1707-1725

<sup>35</sup> The term bajo (bajo or baja) comes from the Spanish word bajo for “low.” It has been suggested that the instrument is named after the flauta baja or low flute of South America.

<sup>36</sup> Mills, et al., *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts and Nevis*, 9.

dance, and oratorical Christmas traditions. Mills and Jones-Hendrickson provide a description:

As the name implies, this group was concerned with the business of Nagos or 'stupid vulgar blacks.' The players ... were accompanied by a small band of musicians with guitars, quattros, triangle and baha. Wire masks may or may not be worn, and occasionally on may have his entire face covered with soot and locomotive grease. The clothes were extraordinary: a derby on the head, long black scissors-type frock coats, rumpled tie or big bow tie, and trousers sometimes decorated with colored rags sewn thereon; and after a character or two who were men dressed like women, complete with wig, dress, and exaggerated breasts and buttocks. On occasion, groups would make use of natural women that looked like this, and despite their shortness and fatness, they would amaze the on looking crowd with unbelievable gyrations of their rump... The pattern of Niega Business is to move through the streets, music at a tempo, the players leading the band as they dance, and children and adults following the procession till they stop temporarily to play.<sup>37</sup>

Christmas has long been a time of both merriment and insurrection. In 1769 a law was passed that there was to be a "Christmas Guard" of a "Detachment of Militia Men" to take offending persons into "Custody."<sup>38</sup> As Vincent Hubbard writes,

As bands of slaves would roam the island performing musical shows at the estates getting food, drink, and money in return. If they did not receive what they believed was due them or harboured resentments against specific planters, disturbances could result. The militia was always on stand-by at those times and Christmas was not a happy time for the planters."<sup>39</sup>

Missionaries, many of whom were passive abolitionists, arrived in St. Kitts and Nevis in the late eighteenth century and converted Christmastime from leisure celebration into religious observance. This is, perhaps, where the beginning of competing notions of Christmas began—as will be explored further, the existence of these competing ideas is part and parcel of Christmas celebrations today. During my fieldwork, several of the young people who performed at the St. Georges Anglican Christmas concert, which is the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Hubbard has noted that Christmas has long been an occasion not only for celebration but also for slave insurrection and uprising. (For example, 1725 on Nevis and 1522 on Hispaniola).



premier religious Christmas event on St. Kitts, were also participating in the Soca Monarch competition and other decidedly secular carnival activities. One young woman in particular performed a well-received version of “Silent Night” in front of a crowd of several hundred that included the then-Prime Minister Denzil Douglas. A few days later, she performed in the Soca Monarch competition with a song about making her “batty talk.” Another young man who was introduced as having the wonderful “God-given gift” of musicality was the star of the Junior Calypso King Competition and performed at the Calypso King Competition later that month.

Although the forms that make up the Christmas Sports have origins in the colonial history of SKN, they came to represent the indigenous unique cultural productions of both islands. Through the sugar heyday of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, St. Kitts and Nevis were among the most important British colonies in the Caribbean. In 1952, President of the Council called St. Kitts “the corner stone of the almost limitless Colonial Empire.”<sup>40</sup> Nevis was a major hub for The Royal African Company and by the mid 1700s, St. Kitts was, per capita, the most prosperous sugar colony and was noted to produce the most and the best quality sugar in the Caribbean. After the fall of the Caribbean sugar Empire in the early nineteenth century, and following full Emancipation (after the four year “apprenticeship period”) in 1838, many free blacks in SKN migrated to other islands to find work. The small geographical areas of St. Kitts and Nevis and the pervasiveness of sugar and large plantations on those islands left little land for emancipated slaves to own. The demographic of the islands also changed notably when, in an effort to replace the cheap labor force, a number of Portuguese, African, and East Indian immigrants moved to St. Kitts (and some from St.

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<sup>40</sup> Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts*, 126.

Kitts to Nevis) in the 1850s.<sup>41</sup> That is to say, while slavery ended officially, the socially stratified society based on the plantation culture on the island remained. So where Christmas Sports provided an outlet for the disenfranchised and socially marginalized slaves, it served a similar purpose for blacks into the twentieth century. Against this backdrop, it is possible to see how folk practices such as those of the Christmas Sports that allow for expression and mimicry of the upper classes would continue to be important even and especially after slavery's end.

From Dorothy Harding's 1901 "Mystery Plays in the West Indies," we see that the masquerades and roving music, dance, and play practices were still alive and well into the twentieth century:<sup>42</sup> Harding writes,

The spirited music, the bright colors of the dresses, the glitter of tinsel and spangles in the brilliant sunlight, and the lithe, swiftly-darting figure of the dancers— not dancing in the languid slip-shod fashion so often seen in English ball-rooms, but with a passionate, sensual delight in every graceful bend and twirls— all this, set off against a background of rustling plants and gorgeous tropical shrubs, goes to make up a picture not easily to be surpassed for quaintness of design or vividness of coloring .<sup>43</sup>

We are offered another glimpse of the pervasiveness of these forms in Roger Abrahams' work, much of which was based on the recording efforts of he and Alan Lomax in 1962 (see Preface). That the 1962 field recordings were, in part, an effort to support a Federated Caribbean, is just one example of the interrelationship between Caribbean regional politics and local cultural productions.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>42</sup> We see similar confirmation of the persistence of these practices from folklorist Alfred Williams in 1896 where he writes, "In St.- Kitts the negro population make a prolonged holiday of the week beginning with Christmas Eve and ending on New Year's night. Every day from morning until sunset they parade the streets with music, masque, and grotesque costumes. Among the performers were men dressed as women, who stalked about on high stilts, and at times turned in a waltz, with great ease and agility, and untiring energy." Alfred M. Williams "A Miracle-Play in the West Indies" *The Journal of American Folklore* 9, no. 33 (April 1896): 117-120

<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Harding. "Mystery Plays in the West Indies." *The Wide World Magazine*, (April 1901), 191.



**Figure 2 Clowns and string band on Central Street, Basseterre, St. Kitts, 1976. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**



**Figure 2 Masquerade in Basseterre, St. Kitts circa 1920. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**

### **The Decline of Christmas Sports Traditions**

By 1983, the year in which St. Kitts-Nevis was granted sovereign independence from Great Britain on September 19, many were lamenting the loss of the Christmas Sports traditions.<sup>44</sup> Aside from Roger Abrahams' 1960s work on the mummings in the

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<sup>44</sup> The fear that Christmas Sport traditions are “dying” is, perhaps, part and parcel of the traditions, themselves. Washington Archibald writes of Christmas festivities in St. Kitts Nevis in the 1940s, “The Christmas street entertainment was a tradition which the older people cherished. Every Christmas these

eastern Caribbean, one of the more influential and heavily cited texts about Kittitian-Nevisian Christmas sports was written by three Nevisian émigrés who published a text out of fear that future generations would not know the pre-carnival history of the islands. *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts-Nevis: Our Neglected Cultural Tradition* locates the decline of Christmas Sports traditions in the political and social history culminating in the 1950s:

[1957] marked the portentous beginning of the Trinidad-style carnival in St. Kitts. Among other things, carnival was seen as an appropriate vehicle to boost tourism... If sports alone as an activity at Christmas created a vacuum for the middle class, it was adequately filled by carnival.”<sup>45</sup>

Prior to 1957, Christmastime celebrations were “spontaneous” grassroots efforts that were mostly regarded as an opportunity “to display the native talent of the people of the grassroots.”<sup>46</sup> However, the implementation of an official Carnival in the 1950s represented the culmination of “The social revolution, which had begun in the 1920s.”<sup>47</sup> This initial wind of change, “led by men and women of the new black middle class, re-emerged after the Second World War,” and ushered in a new era of local politics which laid their mark on the Christmastime traditions.<sup>48</sup>

The 1920s and the years preceding saw the strengthening of tensions created by the internal social and racial hierarchies inherent to the colonial plantocracy.<sup>49</sup> Among

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older people nostalgically commented on what they thought was the decline in the quality of Christmas as they knew it when they were young. My father and the friends of his age group used to compare the Christmas of my youth with that of theirs, and they invariably lamented each year that Christmas was steadily losing its splendor.” Washington Archibald, “More Ole Time Christmas” In *The History of St Kitts and Nevis Carnival*, Mosi Mandisa and Simba Warner, eds. (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>45</sup> Mills, et al, *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts and Nevis*, 17

<sup>46</sup> Washington Archibald, “More ole Time Christmas,” Kindle edition

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla became a Presidency on January 1st 1883 and officials in St. Kitts held all of the political and governmental power. This situation created tension and resentment on behalf of

these tensions was the continued deterioration of the quality of life for the poor black masses largely due to falling sugar prices and, consequently, low pay for black workers under white employers in the Leeward Islands. Following recommendations published in the Moyne Report, a survey containing suggestions for amelioration of the Caribbean British colonies commissioned in light of growing civil unrest in the 1930s, the 1940s marked a time of progress for many Kittitians and Nevisians. James Sutton writes that, as stipulated in the Moyne Report, the implementation of a Chief Education Officer, was “a great step toward the liberalization of education in [Kittitian-Nevisian] schools.”<sup>50</sup> This change would democratize the process of high school entry, eliminating what was a highly political and socially dependent process that typically kept “the masses” from attaining secondary education.<sup>51</sup> This change was one among others including

build[ing] better houses for the poor, such as at New Torn Old Pond Site, Cayon, Saddlers and other places; impro[ving] the sanitation of Basseterre, Sandy Point, Charlestown and the country villages, as well as build[ing] Health Clinics all over the islands. More nurses and sanitary inspectors were trained, and more doctors were employed to help the masses to live more healthful lives... It was a period when at last an atmosphere was being created for the poor man and woman to improve themselves, and to get a little more out of life in their spare time, or after they days work was done. Villagers were encouraged to form Village Councils and clubs for the improvement of themselves and their communities.<sup>52</sup>

While these types of innovations certainly marked positive change in the everyday lives of many black Kittitians and Nevisians, they ultimately changed the social backdrop against which Christmas Sports became meaningful and desirable. The education reforms created different sets of aspirations and, accordingly, a varied set of leisure

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Nevisians and Anguillians who felt doubly colonized by St. Kitts, and by Kittitians who felt they had to pull the ‘dead weight’ of the two smaller, lesser islands. The political arrangement remained in tact until St. Kitts- Nevis-Anguilla was granted internal autonomy. After some uprising, Anguilla became a self-governing British colony in 1980. See Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts*, 123 and 129.

<sup>50</sup> James Winford Sutton, *Our Love Prevailed: Narrative of the Life of James Sutton and Family in St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, West Indies, during the 1940's and 1950's* (Sutton Publishing, 1990), 87.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

activities for youth, eliminating time for, and interest in low class arts such as masquerading and Niega Business. Further, as Washington Archibald notes, the local economy could not accommodate the increase in educated and trained citizens who were, suddenly, socially and morally above working in the sugar cane fields. As a consequence, much of the younger population migrated to Britain to find work:

The waves of emigration in the 1950s had a double effect on the culture of St. Kitts. More immediately, they drastically reduced the number of regular Christmas performers, musicians and makers of masks and whips from around the countryside and Basseterre. As these Kittitians turned their backs on St. Kitts, they left a void, which the younger generation was not willing to fill.”<sup>53</sup>

It was on this vector of progress and change, and in response to the void in the lower classes that it created, that the first official Carnival was staged in Basseterre, the capital of St. Kitts in 1957. Musically, the implementation of “Trinidad style carnival” pushed out older forms in favor of the relatively new sound of the steel pan. Where large orchestras playing European and Cuban forms such as the waltz and son characterized pre-WWII popular music, the steel pan provided accompaniment for the immediate post-WWII era.<sup>54</sup> The steel pan marked a major change in the dynamics of music and the demarcation of space, as it was the first type of ensemble in St. Kitts and Nevis to be welcomed in both dance arenas and as part of Christmastime celebrations “on the road.” By the 1960s, forms of amplification and electric instruments were in musical vogue and began to share space with steel pans on the Kittitian-Nevisian music scene. *Combos*, such as Comet’s Combo (1966), the first electric combo in Nevis, were made up primarily of bass guitar, rhythm guitar, keyboard, drum set, and a lead guitar. Combos in St. Kitts-

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<sup>53</sup> Archibald, “More Ole Time Christmas,” Kindle edition.

<sup>54</sup> It has been noted that Iron bands, in which revelers bring together pieces of scrap metal and found object and make percussive arrangements, were also popular in the 1940s. Prior to the widespread appeal of the steel pan these orchestras were made up of wind sections, upright bass, piano and sound box— a bass marimba-type instrument.



Nevis generally played instrumental versions of popular music from around the region, The United States, and the UK. Reggae, in particular, was sweeping the world and rocking the West Indies. Kittitian-Nevisian combos gladly covered Jamaican music styles alongside soul and R&B hits. By the 1970s, larger combos also called “brass” or “brass bands,” that incorporated large horn and wind sections into electric bands gained increasing popularity. Eventually, these types of brass ensembles began incorporating vocals into their sound and continued covering top 40 songs in addition to forwarding a regional calypso-influenced sound.

### **Tempo as Innovation**

The most famous of these combos was Ellie Matt and G.I’s Brass (short for “Group Impressions”), which was formed in 1969, and performed steadily throughout the region and in the diaspora throughout the 1980s. While 1957 marked the first governmentally organized carnival in Basseterre, St. Kitts, 1971 was the first year of what was known as “National Carnival.” The implementation of National Carnival came on the heels of major political change: in 1967 St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla became an associated state and after much social protest, including what has been called the “Anguillan Revolution,” Anguilla seceded from St. Kitts and Nevis. The years between 1967 and 1971 were politically turbulent and carnival celebrations were unstable— there was no carnival in 1967, and in 1970 there were two carnivals, held by opposing political parties. In light of the resurrected National Carnival of 1971, Ellie Matt was quoted as having said that it was a time for musicians like himself to focus on “our own materials, and play our own songs.”<sup>55</sup> While his band did continue to create covers of other songs in addition to composing and performing original pieces, it could be said that this era heralded the development and dissemination of a particular *style* of Kittitian-Nevisian

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<sup>55</sup> Jacqueline Cramer-Armony, “St. Kitts-Nevis,” 401



music that, building on a precedence set by the integration of steel pans into Carnival, would straddle the boundaries between Christmas carnival celebrations, popular dance music, and vocal music.<sup>56</sup> If G.I.'s Brass was representative of a distinctive Kittitian-Nevisian sound, then a salient portion of that sound was achieved through utilizing a faster tempo than was the norm of the time.

Take for example G.I.'s 1976 hit, "Shake Your Booty" which was a cover of K.C. and the Sunshine Band's song of the same name (also known as "Shake Shake Shake") earlier in the same year. According to Mick Stokes, one of the band's lead singers and drummers,

Shake Ya Booty was what [G.I.'s Brass] actually broke into the American market with. We added a calypso flavour and the white people loved it along with the blacks. It was number #1 on the radios for three months. The white people loved it when we visited the US and promoters fought to book us... we had a following."<sup>57</sup>

The G.I.'s Brass version of the song deploys a much more active bass line and more liberal use of an improvisatory styled drum pattern. However, the most striking difference between that version and the original is the tempo. K.C. and the Sunshine Band's song moves along steadily at 115 beats per minute whereas the G.I.'s version comparatively bolts ahead at 130 beats per minute. It's not surprising, then, that by 1983 not only were many mourning the loss of Christmas Sports, but they were also distinctly aware of other, tempo-based changes in Kittitian-Nevisian popular music. An article from the St. Kitts and Nevis Independence Magazine, for example, described the difference between

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<sup>56</sup> Before the 1970s, dance music and vocal music were two distinct categories and were consumed in different spaces. An article from the Independence Magazine from 1983 noted that prior to the 1960s, "Microphones were not generally known in a dance hall; for people who wished to sing did so at concerts." "Our Music" *Independence Magazine*, St. Christopher and Nevis, (September 19, 1983).

<sup>57</sup> Mosi Mandisa and Simba Warner, "Profile of Mick Stokes" In *The History of St Kitts and Nevis Carnival*. (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011) Kindle edition.

pre-1960s music and music of the 1980s saying, “In those days the music was softer, the love songs more romantic and the calypsos slower and less frenzied.”<sup>58</sup>

While Stokes refers to the G.I.’s Brass version as having “calypso flavor,” the text in which he is quoted refers to the “Shake Your Booty” cover as “a soca version.”<sup>59</sup> This slippage of nomenclature may be due to the fact that 1976, the year the cover was created, was around the time that Lord Shorty (later Ras Shorty I) began popularizing a hybrid Caribbean style that he called Sokah (or soca). Lord Shorty has described sokah as a combination of calypso and Indian tassa drumming. However, there is a longstanding discussion amongst soca and calypso enthusiasts about the defining differences between calypso and soca. It has been suggested that subject matter (where soca is less politically oriented than calypso); popularity (once a song reaches a certain level of fame, it is considered soca even if it may also be a calypso); and tempo (where soca is just fast calypso), are each *the* defining characteristic of soca in relation to calypso. Similar negotiations between genres occur with contemporary KN music styles.

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<sup>58</sup> “Our Music” Independence Magazine, Np.

<sup>59</sup> Mandisa and Warner, *The History of St. Kitts and Nevis Carnival*, Kindle edition.



**Figure 3 Ellie Matt and The G.I's Brass Band circa 1977. Courtesy of the St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**



Figure 4 Coca Cola Coronets Steel Orchestra at Carnival 1975-76. Photo by Joe Pane

### **A Different Beat: Wylers vs. Soca**

Returning again to Ali Dee's performance at the 2012 St. Kitts-Nevis Soca Monarch competition, strikingly absent from her representation of Kittitian-Nevisian carnival were the signature sounds of *wylers*, the ubiquitous and omnipresent musical accompaniment of the St. Kitts-Nevis Christmastime Carnival season. An omission of *wylers* from a run-down of SKN Carnival, such as Ali Dee's, is glaring because, since the year 2000, it has been the only genre played during quintessential carnival activities such as Jouvert, the New Year's Day parade and "Last lap"—the second parade and the official end of Carnival season on January 2<sup>nd</sup> of every year. Where St. Kitts-Nevis carnival was conceived of as a local approximation of a Trinidad style carnival, oftentimes the term "soca"— as the sound of Trinidad carnival— works as a stand-in for

“wylers.” The practical outcome of this overlapping of nomenclature is that some entries in the soca monarch competition align more closely with one genre or the other. Despite this confusion, the difference between the two genres, however, is usually readily apparent to Kittitian and Nevisian audiences as the following episode describes.

I met Rankin Skeff, another of the contestants in the power soca segment of the 2012-13 Soca Monarch competition, accidentally, at a bar one afternoon earlier in December. He mentioned to me, in response to my declaration that I was “here to research music,” that he would be performing in the soca competition even though “what we do here isn’t really soca.”

**JSB:** “It’s not? So what is it?”

**RS:** “It’s not soca. It doesn’t have the real soca rhythm. The beat is different.”

**JSB:** “What’s the difference between the soca rhythm and *this* one?”

**RS:** “I can’t do it here, but you can hear it.”

It was unfair of me to ask him to produce the rhythm at a bar where soca classics from bands like Burning flames and Byron Lee were playing over the loud speakers on the tourist boardwalk where we were seated. But I was anxious to have someone pin down for me exactly what “the beat” was. At any rate, Rankin Skeff was right. Despite its participation in a soca competition, Rankin’s song, “No rag No Flag” bared very little resemblance to the types of songs in the Trinidad soca monarch finals of the same year. And, again, he was onto something when he said the difference was in “the rhythm.” The most prominent similarity between the power soca entries for that year in Trinidad and those in St. Kitts was the fast tempo or, as it is called in St. Kitts and Nevis, the “pep.” As it was explained to me, “It’s like salt fish. Everybody in the whole Caribbean got salt fish. But here it’s juicy and nice with red gravy— tomatoes or ketchup or what have you. In Trinidad or Jamaica it ain’t so. It’s drier.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Pedro,” personal communication, December 18, 2012.

The discord between popular understandings of what soca is (as a Trinidadian genre) and local rhythmic preferences has not gone unnoticed by audiences. In 2011, Ali Dee's song "With or Without You" was celebrated locally for having made it to number 1 on the "Vibes FM UK" charts.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, it was the first runner up in the "groovy soca" portion of the St. Kitts Soca Monarch competition of that season. That same year, King Konris, a popular calypsonian turned soca artist cum politician, won the soca monarch competition in SK and went on to compete in the semi-finals for the International Soca Monarch title in Trinidad. Ultimately, Konris did not advance to the finals and it was suggested by a commenter that, on the heels of Konris' loss, that Ali Dee should represent St. Kitts at the International Soca Monarch competition, instead, because her style more suits a Trinidadian audience:

Well she is singing Trini Soca...which is much different from St. Kitts Calypso...so Konris you are representing this year again in Trinidad, so you better make a soca song if you want to be in the running. I know that the Trinis don't like St. Kitts calypso speed...they won't even play it here in Virginia...and when the Kittitian DJ them playing St. Kitts music, everybody sit down, and as soon as he starts to play Trini Soca and Jamaica Reggae, everybody get up and dance...so make the shoe fit for the occasion. (Sic)<sup>62</sup>

In response, another commenter refuted the idea that Konris should create music in the Trinidadian style saying, "I differ ..I don't think he should change his music to suit no one....He should be Natural ...original ....and Unique !! and Rep sk music (sic)."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Vibes FM is a popular Internet radio station that has come to hold influence amongst Caribbean communities in the diaspora looking to stay abreast of new music from the Caribbean.

<sup>62</sup> Comment 11 January 7, 2012 (10:58am)

<https://www.facebook.com/SKNCarnival/posts/208385959252274>. It is notable here that this commenter refers to the local style as "calypso" in an effort to differentiate it from "Soca" that is imagined here as a Trinidadian genre.

<sup>63</sup> Comment 12, Ibid.

When this commenter mentions “SK music” he is referring to wylers, a style of music that dominates, indeed, defines contemporary carnival and much of youth culture in St. Kitts-Nevis. While this type of music is consumed, enjoyed and performed on the islands all year round, carnival is the time when it becomes inescapable as its literal vibrations emanate from large speakers, mobilizing not only through its sound waves but also as it rolls through the islands on the back of a tractor. Allow me to offer a brief description of the arena in which wylers becomes most visible and audible.

### **Jouvert 2012-13**

Carnival in St. Kitts-Nevis technically begins around 3am on Boxing Day, December 26<sup>th</sup> with Jouvert.<sup>64</sup> However, carnival participants often begin preparing months in advance for the “Street Activities” aspects of carnival, which include Jouvert, the road march competition, the new year’s day “Grand” parade, children’s carnival (December 31<sup>st</sup>), and “last lap”— the final jam session parade on January 2<sup>nd</sup> that ends the carnival season. The various Jouvert and New Year’s parade day troupes (known simply as “the troupes”) follow a particular float as it lurches down the road following the prescribed parade route. On each float there is a DJ or one of three or four wylers bands surrounded by dozens of massive speakers playing the popular tunes that have registered to be part of the road march competition for that year. Road march entries are given points based on the amount of times each song is played at various allocated judging stations along the carnival parade route.<sup>65</sup> Carnival goes who wish to participate in

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<sup>64</sup> Jouvert is a contraction of the French ‘jour ouvert’ or “day open” and is a pre-dawn carnival celebration prevalent in many islands of the Caribbean.

<sup>65</sup> As of 2014 there has been a change in the way road march entries are judged. In order to combat “monotony” that resulted from DJ’s “trying to make sure their favorite tune was playing when the troupe passed the judging stations, they have lessened the number of judge points to two and the two stations are now further apart. This way, there can be a greater variety of songs played on the parade route without interfering with the Road March competition.” “Judging Criteria for Road March” Accessed December 25, 2014, <http://www.stkittsneviscarnival.com/press-single.asp?conid=4>

Jouvert or the Grand Parade choose from several troupes differentiated by their various colorful and playfully themed costumes. In early November, these troupes reveal that year's theme with a festive fashion show. Jouvert troupes are generally more informal than Grand parade troupes and, unlike the feathered and bedazzled bikini and fishnet ensembles that typically characterize modern Grand parade ensembles, Jouvert uniforms consist of a t-shirt, shorts, a whistle, a water bottle, a bandana, and other playful accouterments relating to the year's theme, such as a set of plastic devil ears, a glowing light saber toy, and a light backpack. These Jouvert essentials were included in my Jouvert package along with the promise of "unlimited premium liquor," for a fee of \$85 ECD (Approximately \$31.50 USD), when I joined the "Glow Devils" troupe for Jouvert 2012.<sup>66</sup>

We were instructed, via a post on the troupe's Facebook page, to "meet at 3am in the parking lot of Ram's Supermarket" which is located in the Bird Rock section of Basseterre, just off the parade route.<sup>67</sup> Even at half past 3am, the atmosphere was festive and provided a stark contrast to the quiet of the suburban residential Bird Rock neighborhood. There was a small section of the parking lot with a vendor selling salt fish and johnny cakes as a small breakfast for revelers. A DJ played a stripped down, instrumental wylers *riddim* of synthesized drum kit and a melodic bubble-pop sound that, over the course of 20 or so minutes, got faster and faster and higher in pitch. The speakers were already stacked and strapped onto the float when I arrived at the parking

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<sup>66</sup> My preparation for Jouvert started early Christmas evening when Karen, a family friend in her late 30s who was born and raised in St. Kitts but recently migrated to St. Maartin, asked me when I was going to "make" my shirt. She reminded me that one of the most important parts of the Jouvert uniform is a t-shirt that is cut, torn, and tied to create different designs and fits with the standard troupe shirt. Karen carefully explained to me the basics of t-shirt cutting and told me that the following year I could take the shirt to one of the many women on the island who specialize in reconstructing Jouvert t-shirts. This practice is one of the many acts of female creativity and artistry that goes unacknowledged in the official promotion of carnival.

<sup>67</sup> "St. Kitts Red Devils," <https://www.facebook.com/SkRedDevils?fref=ts> accessed December 24, 2012.



lot around 3:30am, but several men were working feverishly to finish preparing the morning's drink. The recipe, which consisted of many handles of rum and very little else, was being mixed in large, blue 55-gallon plastic drums. Around 4am, the DJ began playing what would be that year's winning Road March song, "Do The DCH" or "Drop, Cover, Hold on" by The Small Axe Band, and this signaled to those gathered that we would be heading to the parade route shortly. Everyone began to take turns walking up to the float with their provided water bottles, handing the bottles up to the men on the float who dipped them in the drum, filling them with deceptively sweet rum punch.

We started on the parade route shortly after 4am, moving slowly, stopping at times to jam (dance and walk simultaneously) harder or to take a breather, with hundreds of people glowing in the dark with their devil ears and plastic sabers lighting the way. We jammed around Basseterre, down the Bay Road, passing the tourist port, Port Zante, St. Georges Anglican church, and The Circus at the center of the city. The only music coming from the massive speakers from 4am until after noon were the few wylers songs that were entered into the year's road march competition. These tunes included a song by The Nu Vybes Band called "One Order" that borrowed heavily from the 1990 conscious reggae hit, "One Blood" by Junior Reid, and "Big Shake" by Kollision Band. Each of these songs was looped, stopped, rewound, and played again for upwards of thirty minutes. Men and women, mostly younger people ranging from mid teens to early thirties, danced and jammed, "chooking," "shubbing back" and "wukin" down the road. The fast tempo of the music gave way to fast movements—momentary demonstrations of skill, flexibility, and sexuality. With hundreds of people moving, jumping, and swaying in the dark there was very little room for personal space or autonomy over who or when would be rubbing against you. Men danced on women, women danced on women— much of the time simulating sex acts. Men pushed one

another to the rhythm, extending their hands and arms and jumping from side to side, colliding laterally with one another— all of this happening to the constant beat.

At noon the festivities saw a change of pace when on Bank street, directly adjacent to the circus, and right on the other side of the large wall separating the cruise ship port from central Basseterre, there was a “wet-down,” which was a stationary party complete with even more speakers, and a DJ playing a broad range of soca and dancehall from around the region and a sampling of popular wylers tunes from previous years. All of this festivity took place while the crowd got sprayed with high power fire hoses. The cold water is generally a welcomed respite from the hot noon sun, especially for revelers who spent the entire morning sipping on the rum concoction. During Jouvvert 2012, the wet-down session that was flanked on either side by well-placed vendors selling hotdogs and hamburgers, coincided with the disembarkation time for a Carnival cruise ship. If carnival has been produced as a potential draw for traditional tourists, the wet-down jam represented that aim far more than the pre-dawn festivities. I would venture to say that part of the manufacturing of increased tourist appeal for this part of Jouvvert rested in broadening the sonic offerings to include genres other than wylers. Wylers has, over the previous two decades, developed into such a distinctive sound that it could easily be alienating for people (especially tourists) who are not familiar with it.

### **Historicizing “Wylers”: The Online Archive<sup>68</sup>**

“Jamcrew360” was the handle of one of the most prolific contributors to the once-popular trans-Caribbean Internet rum shop islandmix.com. Within the chat rooms

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<sup>68</sup> I have chosen to use “wylers” instead of “wilders” or “wild outs” because it is the only iteration of the term I have seen in print elsewhere on the band Facebook page of Kollision Band (a Nevisian wylers band) (<https://www.facebook.com/KOLLISIONBAND>). It appears that a lack of research or written scholarship about cultural productions from St. Kitts-Nevis has allowed for a great deal of variation in orthographic representations. For example, the form Nega business has been called “Niega” “Nega” “Nyega” “Neaga.” I recognize this text as a starting point for talking about this genre and I have no reservations about other spellings of the word.

and forums of that website between the years 2000 and 2008, a great deal of the previously untold history of small island music from the northern Caribbean islands was debated and discussed as part of an age-old feud between “big islands” and “small islands” of the West Indies.<sup>69</sup> Trinidad, as the birthplace of ubiquitous Caribbean music staples such as the steel pan, calypso, and soca is often given arguably undue credit for many of the musical innovations in the area. One such particularly contentious topic in those forums is that of tempo. There exist currently hundreds of pages of archived forum discussions where “More than Four Missionaries”—forum contributors who sought to spread the word that the small islands contributed fast tempo music to the larger Caribbean musical landscape—have engaged in heated discussion with pro-Trinidad music lay historians. One such Trinidadian online historian (sometimes referred to as “trickdadians” for their tendency to offer Trinidadianized versions of music history in the forums), known as “SocaPhD,” participated heavily in the feuds on the site and agitated nationalist tensions by signing each of his forum comments with a signature that read,

Hailing from Trinidad & Tobago and very proud of it!! Land of Calypso, Steelband, Limbo, Parang, Rapso, Chutney-Soca, Soca, Jamoo, Panjazz and the Biggest, Best & Most Influential Caribbean Carnival in the World with no apology!<sup>70</sup>

Given that the small island Caribbean has not enjoyed a fraction of the archival and ethnographic attention that Trinidad has, much of what the missionaries offered was based on personal experience. Within the last six years, Islandmix.com has crashed and been rebuilt several times and some aspects of these archives have been lost. In 2001, the

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon K. Lewis has described this tension between geographically large islands and small Caribbean islands in his text, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2004). He notes the social paranoia attendant to being from a small Caribbean island as “The small island complex” which is credited as a major factor in the failure of the West Indian Federation in 1962.

<sup>70</sup> “Vinci Taught Trinidad.” <http://www.islandmix.com/backchat/f16/vincy-taught-trinidad-they-plagiarized-our-music-260369/>

website Smallislandmassive.com was born, in part, out of the frustration and tensions created in the chat rooms and forums on islandmix.com where perspectives of members hailing from small islands were not valued. Their motto, “‘Small Island Massive, Taking Over’ To Unite Caribbean People, And to show the world what small island people can do. The Caribbean does not only consist of Four Islands. We are here to bring the REAL island Flavour to you,”<sup>71</sup> is carried through its subsidiary internet radio station, Large Radio (2006)--a reference to the big sounds coming out of the small islands.<sup>72</sup> Large Radio focuses on playing music from all islands of the Caribbean such as *bouyon* from Dominica, *wylers* from St. Kitts and Nevis, and faster-paced soca hybrids from islands such as Antigua and St. Croix—often referred to as “wildouts styles”-- in addition to popular tunes from larger islands. Currently, more than twenty different DJs stationed around the globe including centers such as New York, Toronto, London, Holland, and Miami play weekly sets focused on one genre or Caribbean island. Between these internet spaces, JamCrew360 and others like him have left digital traces of years of debates, questioning, researching, and uploading mp3s, and videos of rare recordings and performances that were meant to justify their arguments for recognizing the small island Caribbean as a force in soca and calypso and the general trajectory of Caribbean music. These “More Than Four” missionaries have created the most comprehensive historical narrative and archive of independence and post-independence-era Kittitian-Nevisian popular music that exists publically.

Since 2013, other internet-based innovations within St. Kitts-Nevis, particularly the introduction of 3G and 4G cellular service and the availability of Apple computers and iPhones for purchase and use in St. Kitts-Nevis (through Lime cellular company)

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<sup>71</sup> “About Us” [www.smallislandmassive.com](http://www.smallislandmassive.com) accessed 1 December, 2014

<sup>72</sup> “More Than Four” refers to the Caribbean islands outside of Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago, and Grenada.

have allowed for more use of fast-paced social media for the dissemination of music and music-related information. By searching the hash tag #wylers on Instagram I came across a few screen names that were similar to those active in the early 2000s on Islandmix and Smallislandmassive. One of these forum-members, Leonard “Jam Crew” Lestrade, CEO, founder, music producer, and recording engineer of St. Kitts Jam Crew Productions, was happy to chat with me over Skype to help me patch together a history of wylers by working through what remained of the forum posts and chat logs. During our ongoing conversation I commented to Lestrade that I was surprised by the amount of YouTube videos of obscure, “vintage” (early 60s through late 70s) vinyl records that were posted in the forums as evidence of wylers, a relatively new genre’s, legitimacy. He responded by saying that “it’s all the same stuff.”

The following history of wylers is strewn together from these forums and online resources. Here I pay special attention to identifying the types of advancements that, especially for older audiences like James Phipps and many of the individuals who illuminate the current state of music and the perception of music in SKN in the following chapters, characterize departure from the past. I suggest that these departures, regarded differently by a newer generation of artistic producers in SKN, also offer a degree of historical continuity for wylers producers and audiences— an idea that I will develop further over the course of this dissertation.

### **Innovation and Tempo in Wylers**

Two major changes in music of the Northern Caribbean heralded the inception of wylers as a new and distinct sound in Caribbean popular music: 1) Fast tempo and 2) The extensive use of drum machines or the “riddim box” by small island bands. By the late 1980s bands from small islands had long been pushing the tempo of soca in a way that their Southern Caribbean counterparts were not. Bands such as Ellie Matt the GI’s

Brass from St. Kitts and Eddie and the Movements from St. Thomas, that utilized large brass and electric combo ensembles had, since the 1970s, created hits with BPMs that hovered between 145 and 150 such as “Shang Shang” in 1978 and “Lamboushay” in 1986. Meanwhile, Trinidadian and Jamaica soca acts such as Lord Shorty with now-soca classics like “Om Shanti Om” and “Soca Fever” (1978) and Byron Lee and the Dragonaires’ “Gimme Soca” (1986) generally only pushed their tempos to a limit somewhere between the range of 120-130 BPM.<sup>73</sup> By the middle of the 1980s, bands of the Leeward Islands, such as Burning Flames, which originated in 1984 out of St. John, Antigua were utilizing the synthesized sounds on their keyboards instead of real brass instruments. Their use of *keyboard brass* is regarded as a milestone in a trend of continued electronic and synthesizer innovation in small island Caribbean music.

By the late 1980s the use of electric drum machines— which had been a common practice in American funk and early hip hop compositions— were being creatively utilized by new bands in the Leeward islands. Specifically, the band Seventeen Plus, which was formed in 1985, is credited as having been among the first bands in the Leewards to utilize more than one drum machine at a time in addition to an acoustic drum kit.<sup>74</sup> By 1987 Seventeen Plus was regularly utilizing two particular types of drum machines which had pre-programmed synthesized percussion sounds. The Roland TR 707 Rhythm Composer was a basic drum kit with distinctive kick drum, snare, and hi-hat sounds. The Roland TR 727 Rhythm Composer, the “sister” drum machine, augmented the 707’s offerings with Latin instruments such as congas, bongos, and maracas. By 1988, the Alesis HR16 was another drum machine that offered an even larger range of

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<sup>73</sup> 1987 is regarded as the year when there was a shift from calypso to soca as the chosen genre of popular music to win the annual Road March competition during St. Kitts-Nevis Carnival.

<sup>74</sup> It was common practice elsewhere to eliminate acoustic drummers in favor of the cheaper alternative of a drum machine.

drum kit sounds that included Latin or, in this case, Caribbean percussion instruments such as a tambourine, triangle, cowbell, and agogo (a high pitched cow bell instrument). These drum machines, locally called “riddim boxes,” were typically operated by the keyboardist during a live performance, and required a fair amount of attention in order to access the appropriate sound patches at any given time.<sup>75</sup>

According to wylers enthusiasts, the years 1989 and 1990 marked the beginning of a distinct wylers sound after bands such as Seventeen Plus, and The Small Axe band from St. Kitts began incorporating Yamaha RX 5 and Yamaha RX 7 sounds into their musical creations. These two riddim boxes, in particular, offered sounds that remain staple auditory markers of wylers. The addition of Yamaha technology allowed Leeward island bands access to sounds that resembled closely the sounds that already signaled carnival and Christmastime. Specifically, these riddim boxes offered a muted, metallic steel pan sound, a synthesized Brazilian cuica drum, which, in its higher register, resembles the timbre of a fife, and several whistle sounds. Additionally, these riddim boxes were programmed with vocal sounds such as someone saying, “hey!” “wow!” “woop!” and “ugh” which was described to me as resembling the sound of “a man getting punched in the stomach.”<sup>76</sup> In 1991, the genre became more solidified with the emergence of a band called 14 Minus with keyboardist Ras Valley, controlling the *riddim* boxes. Valley was known specifically for masterfully operating 7 or more *riddim* boxes simultaneously over the course of a performance, which ranged from open-air jam sessions on basketball courts to the tarp-covered bed of a tractor during Jouvart.

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<sup>75</sup> The drummer for Seventeen Plus operated the *riddim* box. Not the keyboardist.

<sup>76</sup> Leonard Lestrade, Interview, December 5, 2014.

During this time, The Small Axe Band, too with Edwin Lucas, known locally as “Daddy Bouna,” was known for similar feats of dexterity with the *riddim* box. Mostly, however, by the mid 1990s these bands were recognized for their “jump up” style of music that pushed the tempo closer to a range between 155 and 165 BPM. This sound was rhythmically dense and highly syncopated both instrumentally and with the addition of light, sexy, playful and always catchy lyrics. In addition to the regular verse, chorus, and bridge sections of the song, particularly popular songs included a “chant” section that would be recited over the instrumentals featuring *riddim* boxes, live acoustic drum kit, rhythm guitar, keyboards, and electric bass.<sup>77</sup>

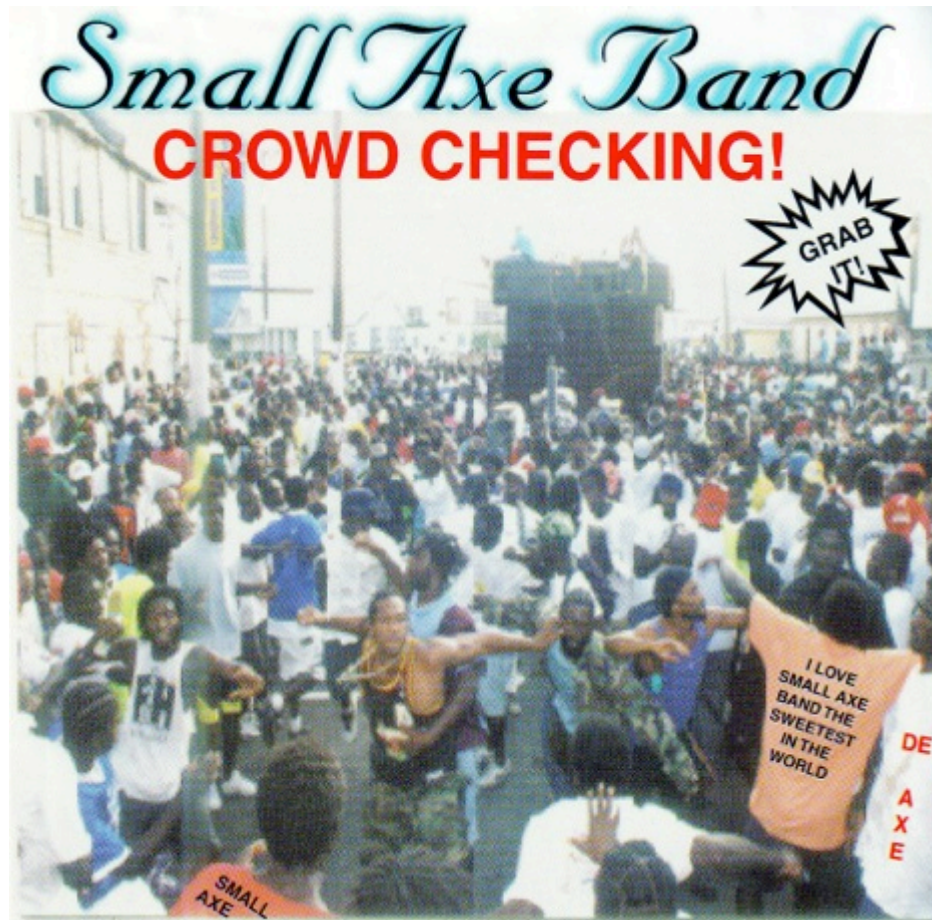
Chants were, and continue to be, an especially popular way to excite a crowd during carnival. During carnival of 1993-4, for example, 14 Minus popularized a chant to a riddim at 166 beats per minute that said, “Rougher than dem? Push Them! Rougher than dem? Jam them! Wine your waist!” Video footage of the carnival shows that during this chant what is referred to in SKN as a “bullring” erupted. A bullring is similar to a mosh pit in that it is an area of concentrated, often violent behavior in the middle of the crowd. In St. Kitts and Nevis, however, bullrings are associated with particularly egregious types of violence such as stabbings and shootings. Jam Crew noted, “the music was just so energetic the riddims were so fast and so raw, they make you go crazy. The kind of dancing we used to do back in the 90s was the swinging hands like you fighting” people used the music as an excuse to ‘act crazy.’”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In some cases, bands released the catchy chant portion of the song to the public via the radio or in live performances before the entirety of the song was written.

<sup>78</sup> Lestrade, Interview, December 5, 2014.





**Small Axe Band 2000 Album Cover for *Crowd Checking* and the “bull ring” dance style.**

The association of the violent, “rude boy” attitude with the youth who closely followed the wylers bands of the mid-1990s is not without context. The mid 1990s was a generally tumultuous time for the entire federation. The atmosphere turned violent after political tensions were aggravated when following the 1993 election, both of the prevailing political parties, PAM (People’s Action Movement) and The Labour Party were hurling accusations of misconduct at one another. The end results of the public melee were the murders of Dr. Vincent Herbert, a founding member of the PAM political party and later the disappearance (later discovered to be a murder) of Vincent Morris, the son

of a PAM government official. Two weeks after Morris' disappearance, in October of 1994, after 6 men who were heavily involved with drug trafficking were charged with the crime, the investigating police officer for the case was assassinated in his car. The global image of St. Kitts-Nevis had been tarnished and the number of tourist arrivals was perceived to have fallen drastically during this time. It was out of this context that the name "wylers" or "wild outs" was coined. The term "wylers" came about to represent music that was associated with the behavior that typified bullrings, which, perhaps unduly, were associated with the drugs, violence, and gang culture of the mid-1990s.

Wylers, in many respects, still suffers from the stigma attached to this era in Kittitian-Nevisian political history despite the fact that since the late 1990s and especially into the 2000s, there has been a concerted effort by wylers bands to prove that their music is not meant to incite violence. During my fieldwork in January 2013, a man was shot while attending a Last Lap (January 2<sup>nd</sup>) Nu Vybes Band performance. The band later held a press conference where they expressed dismay over the stigmatization of their music. The Nu Vybes (also called The Sugar Band) lead singer, Gregory "Mention" Hobson noted that the music is not to blame for the mishaps and, instead, the violence is just a function of the large gathering of people:

Sugar Band, [is] one of the leading bands that they say has a capacity of 10,000 people; I think that is the easier way for a man to escape to do something that wouldn't be as visible in a band that has let's say 5,000 people. So I think this has a lot to do with why a lot of incidents happen in Sugar Band per se, not through the music... We were youths when we basically started. The whole thing about the music, the whole concept of the band started 25 years ago and was always to impact the youths, we as youths, through the music. So that has not changed over the generations."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> "De Sugar Band Lashes Out Against Violence Stigma" January 9, 2013. <http://m.sknvibes.com/news/newsdetails.cfm/68125>

In reference to their entry for the Road March competition for that year, “One Order,” Mr. Mention reiterated the band’s commitment to the values of love and unity espoused in the conscious-reggae flavored song saying,

This year we spoke about “One Order.” So in no way, shape or form we go down that violent road, because that does not do anything for us. We never did it in the past and definitely not in the future. Like I said, the focus of our music is the empowerment of the youths and that is why Sugar Band is still roaring like a lion.<sup>80</sup>

To his point, in their song, “One Order” in addition to emphasizing that “we are all one blood” the chorus consists of the repeated question, “what are we fighting for?”

The conscious theme of this song is not necessarily unique amongst the wylers catalog. Nu Vybes in particular has had a history of more thoughtful lyrics.<sup>81</sup> However, most people associate wylers with the sexual, party lyrics displayed in that year’s entry and winner of the 2<sup>nd</sup> place title, by relative wylers newcomer, The Kollision Band. Founded in 2003, well after the initial phases of the genre’s development, Kollision is the only of these bands to publicly and deliberately brand its music specifically as “wylers.”<sup>82</sup> That year, they followed a trend that characterizes the last 5 years in which wylers bands augment their electronic artistry with digital sampling of popular songs from around the world. Their 2012-13 song, “Big Shake” (160 BPM), borrows its melodic motif from the popular jingle and corresponding dance from the Haitian energy and meal replacement drink of the same name, and features lyrics that describe carnival with a focus on women and their dancing bodies:

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Take for example their 1997 song, “Don’t Stop The Tempo.”

<sup>82</sup> As seen on their band Facebook page and in press materials advertising their tours abroad for an example see “Kollision Band Bringing Wylers to the World” August 9, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10152332254367424>.

**Big Shake:**

The time has come for we to jam again  
We pagin' all we friends  
Kollision band again  
We just can't wait and to see de gyal dem in the place  
They wukin' up they waist, all the fellas want a taste  
They turn and wine the fellas watching from behind  
From the look that's in their eye, you know what's on their mind  
At carnival time, the women run the land  
We love how they does wine  
It is their time to shine

I wanna see they gyal dem in their short tights (wukin' up, wining up)  
Kollision Band you know you got de riddim (to make them dance up and shake)  
Carnival we run de place  
Ladies please come wuk your waist  
Big Shake Song for carnival

I want to see you shake ya bumpa!  
Gyal, let me see you shake ya bumpa!  
Two hands up high, and shake ya bumpa!  
Gyal let me see you big shake big shake big shake fast shake fast shake

Not including the range of topics addressed in wylers songs, sonic markers of the genre include rhythmic complexity in the interplay between the percussive and melodic instruments including the vocalists, mixed media instrumentation (presence of both acoustic and electronic or digital instruments), and the use of particular sound effects and ornamental figures especially a steel pan sound, the synthesized cuica sound, whistles and a high-pitched sound of iron striking iron. All of these elements come together at a tempo between 150 and 170 BPM, which accentuates the thick and busy sound that characterizes the music.

A wylers song from the 2014-15 carnival season aptly illustrates these musical dimensions. "Shake Your Bumper," by The Grand Masters Band features typical wylers instrumentation featuring a synth steel pan and another high-pitch and fife-timbre synthesized sound on the melody. A sole male vocalist singing decidedly carnival-themed lyrics is backed up in three-part harmony on accented words. The song, at 162 BPM, feels

fast due to several stylistic features that characterize most contemporary wylers. The song features recurrent chromatic passages that add to the feeling of building energy throughout. The bass line moves between octaves frequently and, at times, mirrors the vocal melody. The grouping of three eighth notes that characterizes the rhythmic structure of the big drum music characterizes much of wylers, as well. Similar to big drum performance practice, wylers songs feature improvisatory drum riffs over the repeated syncopated backbeat. As exemplified by “Shake Your Bumper,” this stylistic feature accentuates the presence of both synthesized and acoustic drums.

The rhythmic texture offered by the accented eighth and sixteenth notes played by the melodic instruments is augmented by the pulsating effect inherent to synthesized instrument sounds that achieve a sustained pitch through repeated strikes. Here, it is possible to hear the roll created by the compounding of pulsations as similar to the energetic roll of the big drum during wild mas. Lastly, the use of local Kittitian-Nevisian creole, as demonstrated in the word “groung” as opposed to “ground” and “lang” instead of “long,” goes far in denoting this style of music as particularly local to and meaningful in St. Kitts-Nevis. The use of Kittitian-Nevisian dialect is particularly striking because the melody of the verse, which is a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> below the chorus, borrows from the 2013, popular hip-hop song, “Holy Grail” by Jay-Z and Justin Timberlake.

**Shake Your Bumpa:**

Gyal I wanna see you wine and go down on the floor  
Ladies, just wine up and show me you can go the whole down low  
Girl, take that booty to the floor  
Go down low  
Girl, take that booty to the floor

When Carnival come I’m a happy man  
Ladies in the band exposing their top  
Amazing attitude put me in de mood  
Ladies on de groung when they jam dung tounge\*  
And mek me say baby, it’s amazing when I’m in this place with you

I just can' let you go  
I like when we jump up for carnival  
I love how you wuk up your waist  
Han' on de groun--, foot in de air--  
Like you just don' care--  
Winin' everywhere— (you know!)  
And I just love how you cock it up!

Shake ya bumpa  
Gyal, roll ya bumpa  
Lang time me wan' to wuk you  
Lang time we wan' to wuk you  
Get up! Wuk up! Back up! Siddown gyal!  
Lang time we wan' to wuk you  
Lang time we wan' to wuk you

Lead

Shake ya bump-a Gyal, roll ya bump-a Langtime me wan' to wuk you Langtime me wan' to wuk you Get up!

Backup

Shake ya bump-a Gyal, roll ya bump-a Langtime me wan' to wuk you Langtime me wan' to wuk you

L. Syn.

Syn. Xyl.

Bass

Drums

Med snare

Lead

Wuk up! Back up! Sid-down gyal! Langtime me wan' to wuk you Langtime me wan' to wuk you

Backup

Wuk up! Back up! Sid-down gyal! Langtime me wan' to wuk you Langtime me wan' to wuk you

L. Syn.

Syn. Xyl.

Bass

Drums

Figure 5 Transcription of Grand Masters Band 2014 "Shake Your Bumpa" chorus.





**Figure 6 A Big Drum band and masquerade troupe perform for tourists at Port Zante December 2010. Photo by author.**





**Figure 7 “Mention,” Lead singer of The Nu Vybes Band at Carnival 2010-11. Photo by author.**

The idea that music had become “frenzied,” as noted above in the article commemorating independence in 1983, could have potentially been espoused by anyone in the cirum-Caribbean during that time. By the mid-1980s, soca, the more rhythmic and often much faster offshoot of calypso with a more active bass line, which gained popularity in the mid-1970s, had become a staple in Caribbean popular music. By the time St. Kitts-Nevis gained full independence from Britain, the Road March winners of the previous 10 years had all been songs in an up-tempo soca style. In this way, it is fair to say that by the mid 1980s, soca—particularly fast tempo soca— had become the “national” genre of St. Kitts-Nevis carnival. It is striking, then, that the same nostalgia

for past, *slower*, styles and ambivalence toward “too fast” music is still prevalent today in reference to current styles of carnival music, especially wylers. Where Ellie Matt’s brand of up-tempo soca is generally upheld as representing the “heyday” of Kittitian-Nevisian music, wylers often is disregarded as having “no cultural value” because it is “too fast.”

Returning again to Ali Dee’s carnival spectacle, situated between the past and the present, the foreign and the local, and the fast, but not “too fast,” Ali Dee raises issues well beyond the immediacy of her 2012 performance. In performing a fast-paced, soca song that was discernably *not* in a wylers style, Ali Dee essentially circumvented the local sociomusical politics through an appeal to a Trinidadian iteration of up-tempo, “power” soca.<sup>83</sup> To that end, on Ali Dee’s artist page she writes, “I never forget my feminine dignity whilst performing. I am a mother, a teacher and a woman.” She describes her performance style in saying, “Yes, I am an entertainer but I respect myself foremost as a mother. For the example I set is what my little girl will emulate. I don't need to be scandalous to be dominant.”<sup>84</sup> Still, she marks her performance as fiercely local by accessing the musical past of SKN through the deployment of recognizable aspects (sonic and visual markers) of traditional Christmas Sports. In so doing, she necessarily positions herself within the layers of colonial legacy embedded in the makings and remakings of history that characterize the postcolonial period.

Expanding on these themes in the chapters that follow, this dissertation examines how the rhetoric surrounding wylers as “too fast” is indicative of the long and strong legacy of colonization—coloniality—that informs the ways people perceive certain types of sounds and movements. More specifically, I argue that the local characterization

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<sup>83</sup> The “more than four” missionaries contend that Trinidadian Power Soca borrowed the fast tempo (beyond 150bpm) from small island bands in the late 1990s.

<sup>84</sup> “Alison ‘Ali Dee’ Dore” [www.myvuenews.com](http://www.myvuenews.com)  
[http://miyvue.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6548:alison-qali-deeq-dore&catid=59:profiles&Itemid=66](http://miyvue.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6548:alison-qali-deeq-dore&catid=59:profiles&Itemid=66) accessed December 26, 2012.

of wylers as a “too fast” genre not only indexes the especially fast tempo of representative songs, but also marks certain behaviors attendant to wylers as “too fast” in relation to colonial mores of respectability. By deploying the colloquial definitions of the word “fast” and the phrase “too fast” as lenses, each chapter of the dissertation takes up a particular aspect of *wylers* music’s production and consumption.

Chapter Two presents the theoretical grounding for the exploration of the chapters that follow. Specifically, this chapter presents decolonial theory as a base for discussing the perception of wylers and its attendant behaviors. I situate the local rhetoric of fastness that circulates with wylers as polysemantic and within Anibal Quijano’s notion of coloniality of power, which offers a context in which to comprehend the ongoing effects of colonization in the postcolonial era. Here I present decoloniality and decolonial aesthetics as theoretical possibilities for broaching “too fast” in SKN from the side of wylers musicians and consumers.<sup>85</sup> Taking up one of the colloquial meanings of “too fast,” Chapter Three argues that where typical, local use of the word “fast” expresses disapproval toward gossipy or precocious (premature) behavior, criticism of wylers as “too fast,” similarly, is an articulation of discomfort with wylers artists who, consequently, are regarded as unauthorized in their premature participation in musicianship. A case is made for understanding the intentional premature musicianship of wylers artists as a deployment of a decolonial aestheSis in response to formal colonial AestheTics.

Chapter Four contends that the same colloquial use of the term “too fast” that marks certain female bodies as precocious and sexually deviant, also critiques wylers for being “too fast” because of the types of dance moves the music

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<sup>85</sup> Here I am not using the word consumers to refer to capitalist transactions. Instead, I am referring to persons who listen to, enjoy, dance to, and appreciate wylers.

engenders—especially amongst groups of young, middle-class, black women. This chapter then argues for the reimagining of women’s sexualized, carnival dancing as a means of decolonial resistance. The concluding chapter, Chapter Five, broadens the discussion of the legacy of colonization to consider diasporic Kittitian-Nevisian communities in New York City and Toronto, Canada. This last chapter provides insight into the limits of decolonial theory as a useful tool for the examination of Afro-Anglophone Caribbean cultural productions.

## CHAPTER TWO TOO FASTNESS AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY

As a rule, the Kittitians and Nevisians I have met are pleased to know that I am researching local music from St. Kitts and Nevis. Still, upon hearing that I am not focusing on String Band music, as it existed a century ago, many are skeptical about whether there is anything for me to study at all. During my initial fieldwork trip in July of 2010, a tourism and culture official remarked, jokingly, “St. Kitts ain’ really got no local music. Everything we have is from somewhere else.” Not surprisingly, this widespread sentiment was a fascinating point of entry in itself. This is the case not least because St. Kitts and Nevis does have a local genre of carnival road march music that everyone on the islands has, undoubtedly, heard—especially during the Christmas carnival season. And yet, while practically unavoidable, this genre of music, wylers, is generally discursively ignored within discussions of St. Kitts and Nevis’ artistic output.

The lack of an agreed-upon lexicon for even referring to the music made many of my initial interviews and informal conversations about wylers both frustrating and, tangentially, quite informative. At the beginning of each conversation I would find myself spewing a series of adjectives in order to help my interlocutor pinpoint which “local” genre I was referring to. Most often, the words “band music,” would do the trick, at which point my interlocutor would typically respond by saying, “Dat ‘boom boom boom’ in me head ting?” or “Dat jump up ting?” or “Dat shub back ting?” Younger people also occasionally demonstrated their understanding by performing a small but emphatic dance similar to the types of short, quick, lower body movements that are characteristic of the types of dances performed during Jouvert. My interlocutors would accompany these short dance demonstrations with a rhythmic chanting of one of many popular

phrases referring to “pushing” “shubbing” or “getting’ on,” with each utterance accenting a reserved, but precise backward hip thrust, and a quick, foot-pedaling motion. After finally establishing that we were discussing the same thing, while never uttering the word “wylers,” many people remarked that the music is “just too fast.”

In several cases those of my non-musician interlocutors who ranged in age from early twenties to mid forties, suggested that while they enjoy listening to the music during carnival, they still discount the genre as not being “good” or “serious,” citing its being “too fast” as its main drawback. With different reasoning, many older interlocutors—those aged fifty and above—complained of the music’s tempo in relation to its promotion of extreme immorality (typically aligned with sexual deviance), and the lack of socially responsible, or particularly skillful lyrics. These local responses are in some respects, quite similar to some of the critiques from the pan-Caribbean Internet community—critiques evident on sites such as [www.Islandmix.com](http://www.Islandmix.com). Here, a few posters have suggested that Kittitian and Nevisian music has not reached a wider audience because the rhythms are “too fast to dance to.”<sup>86</sup> Along with the heavy-handed suggestion that Kittitian-Nevisian music is “too fast,” these critiques, in light of their different emphases on dance, sexuality, lyrics and more ambiguously aesthetic valuations such as “good” and “serious,” suggest that being “too fast” encompasses much more than just tempo.

The question, then, centers on what constitutes “too fast.” Where and when does a tempo become *too* fast? Cognitive researchers have offered some answers in this regard. Generally, it has been accepted that tempo, itself, depends on the perception of many factors—many of which are not directly related to rhythm. For example, in 1987 John

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.islandmix.com/backchat/f16/120-bpm-114501/index2.html#post1572497> Accessed September 17, 2013.

Geringer and Clifford Madsen suggested that there are musical factors that lead to the general perception of an extreme fastness despite “beat tempo differences.”<sup>87</sup> Also in the late 1980s, other related studies demonstrated that “melodic activity or ornamentation consequentially affect tempo perception.” Kuhn observed that ornamentation in melodies—the presence of “passing tones, upper and lower neighboring tones, and arpeggiated figures in addition to a basic melodic line”—were perceived as faster than melody lines without such ornamentation.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, melodies with larger jumps are generally perceived to be slower than more “simple” melodies. Ongoing research of the perception of the rate of presentation (tempo) of music has been integral to understanding, cognitively, both the performance of and listener’s response to any piece of music.<sup>89</sup>

Within music cognition studies, questions surrounding musicians’ performance decisions with regard to listeners’ perception of tempo have fueled many studies that are interested in pinpointing “additional possible effects of specific music context and/or styles.”<sup>90</sup> Since the late 1980s, music cognition studies have focused largely on interactive auditory dimensions such as pitch, timbre, volume, rhythm, and tempo. For instance, studies have shown that attack and articulation affect tempo perception as “staccato passages are judged [to be] faster than legato ones.<sup>91</sup> Correlations between tempo and volume or amplitude have also been illustrated, as louder volume, perceived

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> T.L. Kuhn, “The Effect of Tempo, Meter, and Melodic Complexity on the Perception of Tempo,” in Clifford K. Madsen and Carol A. Prickett, Eds., *Applications of Research in Music Behavior* (Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 168.

<sup>89</sup> J. M. Geringer, C. K. Madsen, R. B. MacLeod, and, K. Droë, “The Effect of Articulation Style on Perception of Modulated Tempo.” *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 54, (2006): 324-336

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

higher pitch, and perceived faster tempos are often observed simultaneously.<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, Marilyn Boltz has described a direct correlation between pitch and tempo: “[C]hanges in pitch level and timbre influenc[e] the perceived tempo of a melody. Those melodies played in a higher octave or brighter timbre [are] perceived to unfold more quickly than those played in a lower octave or duller timbre.”<sup>93</sup>

Despite these parallels, it should be noted that some of the findings, such as those by Geringer and Madsen, did not hold true for popular music. The scientists attributed this difference to excerpt familiarity and/or generic style, ultimately suggesting that cultural exposure was an important factor in determining how various tempos are received. Recent interventions within ethnomusicology have recognized the potential in a hybridized study of music phenomena that brings together the frameworks and fields of the social and hard sciences. So, while “context” within the cognitive research frame takes into consideration solely musical factors such as ornamentation and volume, it cannot hope to account for familiarity, or for culture, broadly understood. A move toward a more ethnomusicological frame provides for research that is based on ethnography, which is generally attentive to such extra-musical factors. This shift widens the concept of context to include less quantifiable issues that, for the purposes of this dissertation, and in the case of St. Kitts and Nevis, include colonial history and racial identity.

Bearing the importance of context in mind, some cognitive research regarding tempo perception has moved away from interpretability (as cognitive) as a frame and

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<sup>92</sup> Roni Y. Granot, and Zohar Eitan. “How Music Moves: Musical Parameters and Listeners’ Images of Motion.” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 23, no. 3 (February 2006): 221–47.

<sup>93</sup> Marilyn G. Boltz, “Illusory Tempo Changes Due to Musical Characteristics” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 28, no. 4 (April 2011): 367.



has, instead, turned toward appropriateness (and culturally contextual).<sup>94</sup> In this model, subjects are asked to respond to music excerpts based on how appropriate the given tempo is. The actual presence or absence of meaning is, thus, not the focus; instead researchers are essentially gauging participants' assessments of meaningfulness and expressiveness within a piece of music. Scientists interested in appropriateness have reached similar conclusions to those focused on interpretability, suggesting, "the strength of events within a piece of music lead the listener to determine what tempi are appropriate. The relative strengths of these events may require them to unfold more or less quickly in order to construct a perceptual representation of them that makes sense to the listener."<sup>95</sup> Essentially, any particular confluence of musical occurrences within and surrounding a piece of music may effect the perception of its tempo. However, a piece of music's being too fast (or too slow) is a matter of its ceasing to make sense and/or to be appropriate.

Cognitive research, at best, has illustrated that the idea of a piece of music's being "too fast" is highly subjective. The methodological shift from interpretability (as presumably biological) to appropriateness (as approaching cultural) highlights the contextually dependent outcomes of any study of tempo, which ultimately begs a questioning of the very concepts of interpretability and appropriateness as universal. Considered within the historical genealogy of modernity and global coloniality, the search for interpretable or appropriate tempos hinges on what postcolonial scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo and Anibal Quijano have suggested is a false separation of European scientific knowledge (facts) and indigenous or folk knowledge (feelings), resulting in a

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<sup>94</sup> Sandra Quinn, Roger Watt, "The Perception of Tempo in Music" *Perception-London*, 35, no. 2, (2006): 267.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

concomitant subjugation of the latter to the former.

A brief description of the national reaction to very fast popular music in the Dominican Republic elucidates more succinctly some of the above points. Most specifically, it demonstrates that both tempo perception and tempo preference must be understood within a social and cultural context that goes even beyond the Caribbean as a socio-culturally bounded geographical area, and considers particular—largely colonial-based—trajectories.

### **Fastness In Comparison**

Merengue de Calle, or Street Merengue—also called “mambo” by some-- has become the sound of urban merengue in the last decade. Omega’s Alante, Alante” (“Ahead, Ahead”) a Dominican colloquialism for the Spanish word “adelante” meaning “forward” or “ahead,” was, in 2007, one of the first Merengue de Calle songs to reach mainstream status. The song features stylistic aspects of “mambo, reggaeton, merengue and bachata all mixed in for a very original, fast paced sound.”<sup>96</sup> Despite featuring sexuality explicit lyrics, and a much faster beat than other concurrent genres of Hispanophone Caribbean urban musics, Merengue de Calle has been relatively well received on both a popular and national level. In 2009 the national Casandra awards (now called “Soberano” awards), created a category to recognize the popularity of the genre. This is not to say that there has not been any backlash from Merengue purists, and older “more elevated classes.”<sup>97</sup> However, as one music blogger notes, “popular

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<sup>96</sup> <http://www.colonialzone-dr.com/merengue-de-calle.html>.

<sup>97</sup> “Merengue De Calle: The Sound of the Dominican Underground” <http://unfashionablylate.wordpress.com/2008/01/26/merengue-de-calle-aka-mambo-the-sound-of-the-dominican-underground/>.

pressure became insurmountable; now mambo artists play rallies for major presidential candidates.”<sup>98</sup>

That there has been a concerted and united front promoting Merengue de Calle, and a consequential response from officials is notable within the region. It is also notable that despite the fast pace of the music, much of the dissention is in reference to the vulgar lyrics and minimalism of the music. Mentions of the tempo, itself, have in some instances been associated with the virtuosic or “avid” dancing it necessitates as opposed to the connotations of reckless abandon that typically accompany fast-paced dancing within St. Kitts and Nevis. This distinction may be related to the widespread knowledge of distinct merengue dance moves.<sup>99</sup> Further, the geographic disparity between the two countries is stark. The Dominican Republic occupies 18,704 square miles with a population of roughly 10 million while St. Kitts and Nevis occupy 65 and 36 square miles respectively, with a total population of approximately 54 thousand. A comparison of these figures suggests the possibility that there may exist more room for cultural heterogeneity within the national scope of the Dominican Republic. Merengue de Calle as an urban music represents a legitimate portion of the nation’s populace. Within St. Kitts and Nevis, however, there is very little room—quite literally—for geographic or even demographic distinctions within the confines of the nation. That the Dominican Republic gained independence nearly one hundred and forty years prior to St. Kitts-Nevis, from a different colonial empire, is an additionally pertinent factor if we acknowledge music as an important part of postcolonial nation-building and recognize the varying legacies of different instances of European colonization. Still, it is my suggestion that the general lack of dialogue of Merengue de Calle’s tempo, itself, as a

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 87.

problematic, or even discussion-worthy aspect of the genre is a testament to the universal ambiguity or, perhaps, the socio-culturally specificity that surrounds any conception of what “too fast” is.

That said, it is particularly notable, if not strange, that Anglophone West Indians would fault any genre of music due solely to its fast tempo. This is particularly true when considered in the context of Caribbean popular music history since the 1980s and the early development of soca and dancehall. Indeed, many Caribbean music scholars recognize the incorporation of faster tempo to be a signature feature of these two genres’ deviation from earlier styles.<sup>100</sup> Even if we regarded music from St. Kitts and Nevis as faster than other decidedly fast genres of Caribbean music, the markedly different discourse surrounding other types of Caribbean fast music, such as “ultra fast”<sup>101</sup> Merengue de Calle in The Dominican Republic suggests that a) being too fast is not globally—or regionally—recognized in the same ways, if at all; and b) that historical context is of tantamount importance to understanding what is and can be perceived as fast within a socio-cultural context.

Taking up this vein of thought, this chapter is primarily concerned with teasing out the ways in which fastness is understood and employed within the national, racial, and cultural context of St. Kitts and Nevis. By isolating [un]interpretability as the culturally and historically sensitive feature of multi-and interdisciplinary approaches to and conceptions of fastness and tempo, I underscore the problematic of discussing tempo and fastness in generalized and universal terms. Using Walter Mignolo’s notion of coloniality/modernity, this chapter ties the prevalent impetus to regard tempo

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<sup>100</sup> This is particularly true for soca’s development from calypso, a stylistic turn heralded by Lord Shorty (Ras Shorty I). See Jocelyn Guilbault “On Redefining the Nation Through Music” in Milla Riggio, ed. *Carnival Culture in Action: The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 228-238.

<sup>101</sup> “Merengue de Calle.” Accessed June 19, 2013. <http://www.colonialzone-dr.com/merengue-de-calle.html>.

universally to the larger history of coloniality, and further demonstrates how coloniality (as central to both the temporal and social) has defined notions of fastness in the Anglophone Caribbean. By employing decoloniality as the theoretical parallel to the on-the-ground response to coloniality, finally, this chapter presents decolonial aesthetics as a frame for this dissertation's exploration of two local and colonial iterations of fastness, and the decolonial and musical responses thereto.

### **Decoloniality and Tempo: Dewesternizing Time**

The fact that cognitive science has tied the definition of “too fast” to interpretability becomes useful for my purposes because it may point toward the source of discomfort and ambiguity that many Kittitians/Nevisians confront in the moment of perceiving a musical performance as “too fast.” Utilizing research methodologies that incorporate the terms and concepts of the community that is being studied has become foundational to a new, self-conscious branch of social science. This is particularly true for current thinkers whose interests lie in decoloniality as an academic and practical project in the global south. Walter D. Mignolo has used the term modernity/coloniality as a textual and visual representation of modernity and coloniality as conceptually inseparable in the present world system, thereby emphasizing that, “coloniality is constitutive of modernity, not derivative of it.”<sup>102</sup> He historically positions post-Enlightenment thinking as the driving force behind colonialism as an epistemic project of domination. Decolonial thinking enables him to highlight the long history of colonialism as the ever-present underside of modernity. Mignolo points out that modernity includes a systematic incorporation of a colonial episteme that redefined and

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<sup>102</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality at Large: The Western Hemisphere in the colonial Horizon of Modernity,” in Enrique D. Dussel, Carlos A. Jáuregui, Mabel Moraña, eds. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 26.

then erased 'indigenous' categorizations and replaced them with Eurocentric categorizations that simultaneously applied a schema of valuations that designated non-Europeans (and their cultural artifacts) as inferior. In an effort to counteract the cultural ramifications of coloniality, Mignolo proposes decoloniality and what he calls border thinking as "factional" thinking that "works on specific sets of issues built on particular historical legacies, languages, sensibility, experiences, and sense affected through smells and food, bodies, and sexualities, music and everyday life."<sup>103</sup>

This is where cognitive science methodology appears myopic and Eurocentric in its universalizing/globalizing of fastness. Thus, this type of approach falls short in its usefulness for an interrogation of the specific, Afro-Anglophone Caribbean discourse around the state of being too fast. Still, what border thinking emphasizes is thinking from the outside created by the inside. Meaning that border thinking as an act, foregrounds and represents ideas that have been historically "repressed by the dominance of hermeneutics and epistemology as keywords controlling the conceptualization of knowledge."<sup>104</sup> Mignolo suggests that border thinking as decolonial thinking ultimately, "presupposes an awareness of and a sensibility for the colonial."<sup>105</sup> Considering this, I examine some of cognitive science's terminology in order to carve out points of departure for considering how "too fast" may be conceived of as a product of the particular historical and cultural context of coloniality.

One of the prevalent generalizations in music cognition studies argues that a range of 100 to 140 beats per minute (BPM) is that of the "preferred tempo" and that a range of 80-160 beats per minute is the "tempo octave in which every piece of music should be

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<sup>103</sup> Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

interpretable.”<sup>106</sup> Again, what has been left conspicuously un-emphasized, however, is that the people and results represented in such a study are hardly generalizable. This makes the specific tempo octave presented by cognitive scientists a particularly ineffectual reference tool in varied cultural settings. However, the base idea that interpretability constitutes the threshold for tempo preference, is a functional idea that, with significant contextualization, is more easily and accurately transferable.<sup>107</sup>

Both cognitive scientists and musicians accept that once a piece of music moves beyond the extreme of the metric interpretability— once it gets faster-- the human tendency is to perceive the rhythm as unfolding at a slower speed occurring at a multiple of the actual rate.<sup>108</sup> That is to say, there is a metric range, or a set of tempos that may not be considered too fast because they are, for example perceived as half as fast as the calculated BPM would suggest. Indeed, the condition of any piece of music’s being too fast lies in a tempo range that is not actually at the extreme ends of the metric continuum from slow to fast. The moment when rhythmic sound becomes too fast is that in which it becomes decidedly uninterpretable to the listener—a moment that does not necessarily correlate with the actual presence of an excessively fast rate of musical presentation. If we see interpretability as a concept that takes on meaning only in relation to those who are using it, then it functions solely as the idea of a threshold. In this discussion it is the threshold into being and sounding “too fast.” The question, then, is what ideas and actions—manners of being or sounding-- constitute the milieu in which fast, and thusly

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<sup>106</sup> Martin F. McKinney and Dirk Moelants, “Ambiguity in Tempo Perception: What Draws Listeners to Different Metrical Levels,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 24, no. 2 (December 2006):155-166.

<sup>107</sup> Here I am considering “tempo preference” to be directly related to the perception of a musical performance’s being “too fast.” One can assume that the perception of the state of being “too slow” would occur similarly. However, slowness is not considered in the current discussion.

<sup>108</sup> Dirk Moelants, “Preferred Tempo Reconsidered,” Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition, (Sydney, 2002).

“too fast” work in St. Kitts and Nevis?

The vast majority of the Kittitian youth’s popular music that is described by many Kittitians and Nevisians to be, among other things, too fast, hovers around 160-170bpm. Some other genres of Caribbean music that receive significant airplay within St. Kitts and Nevis, particularly power soca from Trinidad and Tobago, are, in terms of BPM, also significantly fast-paced. And yet, within the Kittitian/Nevisian community soca from elsewhere is not regarded with the same tempo-based disapprobation. Surely the fierce nationalism that characterizes much of Caribbean citizenship plays a part; music from elsewhere does not incite much moral concern unless it is understood as a detriment to national culture.<sup>109</sup> It is clear, then, that a music’s designation as “too fast” for the Kittitian-Nevisian community involves much more than a metric assessment.

As we have seen, tempo is just one small and un-isolatable aspect of being too fast. Recognizing tempo as codependent on other, intersectional factors suggests that no tempo taken and examined alone is too fast. Each instance of tempo and fastness is necessarily a conceptual product of a web of factors. Necessarily, this web (itself a condition of modernity/coloniality) is what Mignolo refers to as the colonial matrix. The colonial matrix is a concept not unlike the idea of intersectionality as popularized by law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw’s desire to “demonstrate the way that prevailing structures of domination shape various discourses of resistance” was in direct response to feminist and antiracist scholarship that failed to recognize the interdependence of factors such as gender and race in the unique experiences of women of color.<sup>110</sup> For Mignolo, the colonial matrix is constituted by the various intersections of the economic,

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<sup>109</sup> See Deborah Thomas, *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>110</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241- 1299.



civic, political and epistemic systems where neoliberal capitalism, the criminalization of non-heteronormative sexualities, the conflation of nation and state power, and the negative valuation of non-European thought are always at play and provide the backdrop for any and all occurrences and interactions in the colonial and postcolonial world.

If, as Mignolo suggests, places such as the Caribbean are parcels of the “imaginary of the modern/colonial world system... [and] they are also the grounding of a system of geopolitical values, of racial configurations, and of hierarchical structures of meaning and knowledge,”<sup>111</sup> then the particularly Kittitian and Nevisian colonial system framing the discursive reactions to local music—as well as most of the local interpersonal interactions—is *decorum*. As I will demonstrate below, in St. Kitts and Nevis, being too fast is intimately tied to *decorum* as an overarching principal that, in self-consciously keeping the methodological aims of cognitive science in mind, can be broken down roughly into interpretability (content) and appropriateness (context), which are denotative categories that are locally rooted in a colonial episteme via the conceptual historical opposition of sense and nonsense. The following historical contemplation of interpretability and appropriateness reveals the fraught colonial context of both the speech and social economies of *decorum* in the small island Caribbean.

### **Time, Coloniality and the West [Indies]**

The teleological notion of time articulated by the Western Enlightenment became the epistemic foundation for African American anthropology’s search for an African past. That Caribbean artistic productions and ways of life constituted a historical past for Africans in the United States is example of what Johannes Fabian has called the “evolutionary temporalizing” of the world:

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<sup>111</sup> Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 170.

...The starting point for any attempt to understand evolutionary temporalizing will be achieved with the secularization of Time. It resulted in a conception which contains two elements of particular importance to further developments in the nineteenth century: 1.) Time is immanent to, hence coextensive with, the world (or nature, or the universe, expending on the argument); 2) relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociological entities) can be understood as temporal relations. Dispersal in space reflects directly, which is not to say simply or in obvious ways, sequence in Time. Given the socio-political context of these axiomatic truths in the industrializing and colonizing West, it would seem almost inevitable that social theorists would begin to look for scientific frames in which to place ideas of progress, improvement, and development.<sup>112</sup>

In this conception, time is conceived of as linear (spatial) and Europeans and non-Europeans cannot be seen as coeval—neither occupying the same space on the conceptual time line nor moving into (or with) modernity at the same speed. Along with this idea came the logic that some people—indigenous people, Africans, displaced blacks—could be conceived of only as emplaced, stuck, or slow while Europeans were evolved and further along and progressive. Fabian, writing that, “there is no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act,” asserts that time became an instrument for the creation and sustenance of difference between Europeans and their Others.<sup>113</sup> The ‘objectivity’ of cognitive studies would like to suggest that discourse using “fast” or “too fast” is based on the discrete observation or perception of fastness (much like “traditional” or “indigenous”) as a universal object. However, in line with Fabian, I suggest that discourse that utilizes notions or terms such as “too fast,” instead functions vis-à-vis fastness. Meaning, fastness and being “too fast” are relative categories of the Western Enlightenment and not objects that represent the musical practices being codified by them.

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<sup>112</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

In the 2007 chapter “Uprooted Bodies: Indigenous Subjects and Colonial Discourses in Atlantic American Studies,” Michelle Stephens investigates the legacy of Western logic that depicts indigenous bodies as emplaced and slow moving in relation to Europeans who, embodying modernity, are mobile and comparatively quick. Stephens, pursuing a somewhat revisionist history, proposes that we, instead, see indigenous populations (including enslaved Africans) via models that highlight ideas such as the polycultural—models, that is, which render these populations mobile.<sup>114</sup> This revised view of what amounts to global black and brown bodies as moving and, comparatively, moving faster, is in line with the musical performances and discursive practices in St. Kitts and Nevis. My goal here is to discuss the idea of fastness, and particularly of too fastness, not solely within auditory or musically temporal realms of conception. Instead, I suggest that fastness is a broadly understood concept that is employed as such by the people for whom fastness is an aspect of decorum that functions as an instrument of colonial power. The following history of decorum in the Anglophone Caribbean further explains this point.

### **The History of Decorum and Cultural Binaries**

Western conceptions of teleological time facilitated theoretical frames for understanding cultural (racial, ethnic etc...) difference that were easily couched in binaries. Caribbean research particularly since the early 1970s, has deployed related binaries such as respectability vs. reputation, public vs. private, African vs. European, Slave vs. Master, and talking sweet vs. talking broad to describe the types of social organization characterizing the black Caribbean. The utilization of the Caribbean as a

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<sup>114</sup> Michelle Stephens, “Uprooted Bodies: Indigenous Subjects and Colonial Discourses in Atlantic American Studies,” Shukla, Sandhya, and Heidi Tinsman, eds., *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 190-213.

liminal space in between the United States and Africa has a similar legacy within the anthropology of Africans in the Americas. By the turn of the twentieth century, Blacks in the United States, though freed from the physical restraints of slavery, were still perceived as drastically inferior to European descendants. The theories bolstering their treatment suggested that there was a biological correlation between the presence of European genes, and a high capacity for intelligence.

Socially, one of the prevailing arguments for the inferiority of the “negro race” was based in part on the idea that blacks lacked a history and thus a culture after being distanced from Africa and their respective religions, languages and other cultural specificities. In effect, African slaves had become a blank slate on which European cultures could be—and were-- imprinted.<sup>115</sup> Through his research, Melville Herskovits, one of the most prominent researching anthropologists involved in this political and academic debate, sought to “provide blacks with that [missing] past through the scientific documentation and systematic presentation of ‘Africanisms’ in New World Negro Culture.”<sup>116</sup> The Caribbean, then, became a laboratory for an early iteration of anthropological fieldwork that would demonstrate continuities between traits found in the African American community in the United States, and descendants of African slaves in other parts of the New World. In 1937, Herskovits would write *Acculturation: The Study of Culture*, as an answer to Franklin Frazier, a prominent sociologist, who argued against the notion that any African cultural traits could have survived the transatlantic slave trade journey. *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) was the culmination of much of

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<sup>115</sup> Kevin A. Yelvington *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 48. It is important to note that Herskovits’ role as “father of African American Anthropology” is due, in part, to his own participation in gatekeeping, and sexist practices. For a thorough description of the problematic history of Herskovits as gatekeeper, see Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

this type of work that, demonstrating the existence of Africanisms in then-modern African American culture, suggested ultimately that “African Americans could be shown to have contributed to American culture.”<sup>117</sup> Acculturation, Herskovits’ main theory regarding the interaction and exchange of cultures between European descendants and African descendants, posited that after a period of prolonged contact between two culturally distinct groups, the less dominant group in question (Africans, in this case), acquire many of the cultural traits of the dominant (European) group.

Since the early 1940s there have been many iterations of this idea including Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz’s invented term *transculturation*. Transculturation, different to acculturation, includes “the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation... [and] In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomena” which implies more of a two-way transfer than acculturation suggested.<sup>118</sup> By 1976, in their publication *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (written in 1972-3), Richard Price and Sidney Mintz replaced the one-sided theory of acculturation with that of *creolization* by focusing on the heterogeneity of slave populations. By revising Herskovits’ ideas that regarded both African and European cultures as monoliths, their main intervention rested on the notion that, “No group, no matter how well-equipped or how free to choose, can transfer its way of life and the accompanying beliefs and values intact from one locale to another.”<sup>119</sup> Richard Price encouraged the ethnographic research of more broadly defined similarities between Africans in Africa and Africans in the Americas, noting that the search for “direct retentions or survivals” would be less fruitful than the examination of

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) quoted in Ibid., 71.

<sup>119</sup> Sidney Mintz and Richard Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

the “development within historically related and overlapping sets of . . . ideas.” In this vein, the black Caribbean’s propensity toward loquaciousness and grandiloquence—a trait first described by early travel writers as an attempt to exact European traditions of speech-making and formal communication—could be reconsidered via the framework of creolization.”<sup>120</sup>

Situated within this theoretical genealogy, speech and talk about speech in black small island communities, specifically St. Kitts and Nevis, is both deeply rooted in African continuities and indicative of webbed moral and philosophical ideas. Acknowledgement of this history allows for a more emphatic legitimization of the study of any prevalent term or turn of phrase—as will be demonstrated below-- as a historically and conceptually grounded entre unto the entirety of a culturally bound community. The broadening of the concept of continuities allowed ethnographic research on Africans in the Americas to include “philosophic principals and psychological attitudes,” and not just forms which are “the most superficial level of cultural reality.”<sup>121</sup>

Arguably, the most prominent of the dualisms drawn from the legacy of ethnographic research in the Caribbean has been Peter Wilson’s respectability vs. reputation, which undergirded most of his foundational ethnography of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean*. In this 1973 text, Wilson posits that the division and tension between the social oppositions respectability and reputation drive interpersonal interactions within Afro-Caribbean societies (writ large). Reputation, on the one hand, values autonomy, entrepreneurialism, linguistic cleverness, trickery and virility.

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<sup>120</sup> Here Price notes that philosophical principals and psychological attitudes are “persistent and tenacious because they exist beneath the level of consciousness.” Richard Price quoted in Roger D. Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, 43.

<sup>121</sup> George Simpson and Peter Hammond, “After the Myth” In *African folklore in The New World*, Daniel J. Crowley, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 65

Respectability, or a “respectable lifestyle,” on the other hand, is a “value complex” that emphasizes the importance of education, wealth, color, and religion of a certain sort—Imperial Englishness.

### **Respectability in the British Caribbean Colonies**

Respectability in the British colonies is a primary and oft studied aspect of the colonial matrix of power. The idea that traditional British ways of being, looking, speaking, and living are seen as inherently superior and unquestionably “right” was/is not only a means of demoralizing the colonized, but also a way of creating an undeniable distinction between the colonized and colonizer. Respectability as a focus of scholarly inquiry has been mostly pertinent to area studies in British colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial contexts.<sup>122</sup> Respectability in the context of English colonialism within the Anglophone Caribbean “was not merely a system of economic exploitation and political domination but also one of cultural control that attempted to socialize colonial populations into accepting the moral and cultural superiority of Englishness.”<sup>123</sup> It is notable here to recognize that even notions of ideal Englishness were distant concepts that were often not exemplified by the white, European planter class living on the islands. Richard Dunn has suggested that white Englishmen living in the colonies were often referred to by their counterparts at home as “living beyond the line.”<sup>124</sup> Travel documents from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and extending through the end of the heyday of the planter class in the St. Kitts and Nevis have described the dress and mannerisms of white

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<sup>122</sup> Examples of this focus can be seen in Richard Burton’s 1997 book, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), and much earlier in C. L.R. James’ *Minty Alley* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1939).

<sup>123</sup> Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 4.

<sup>124</sup> Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 20.

Kittitians and Nevisians as “gaudy” and “common.”<sup>125</sup> The immense wealth of plantation owners gave way to a secondary British culture of extravagance and opulence that was frowned upon by the respectable classes living in Britain.<sup>126</sup>

So, if respectability for black West Indians was, in some measure, an attempt to approximate the ideals set forth by the white upper class, then in the case of the British sugar colonies, blacks were doubly removed from proper examples of respectability.<sup>127</sup> Wilson’s respectability vs. relation model has served, perhaps most prominently, as the basis for much discussion regarding the widespread carnival culture in the Caribbean.<sup>128</sup> As Shalini Puri, and others, have suggested, the “crab antics” of the Caribbean, the ambivalence between respectability and reputation, can be seen as analogous to that of the private and public. With regards to speech acts and public performances of decorum, the respectability vs. reputation opposition functions vis-à-vis another binary: sense and nonsense.

Roger Abrahams’ ethnography of St. Vincent builds upon Wilson’s structure by recognizing the differences between sense and nonsense as fixed categories of speech and decorum that are relative to time, place, and audience. During his fieldwork Abrahams found “the amount of talk one hears about talk on the island ... truly striking,” and taking cues from then-recent turns in linguistic anthropology that recognized

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Nationalism through respectability, in some cases, was created and supported by aspirations for middle-classness that created a separation between the lower, working-class peoples and those of the middle-class within a discursively unified people. This type of nationalism through respectability was particularly pertinent in bigger islands such as Jamaica where both a) lowland adaptation and a sizable community of b) mixed, “brown” people were a demographic buffer between poor blacks and whites with formal ties to Britain. In smaller islands, such as St. Kitts and Nevis, there was very little blacks could do to create a real middle class until fairly late in their colonial history.

<sup>128</sup> For a summary of the history of the respectability vs. relation division in Caribbean cultural theory see Shalini Puri “Beyond Resistance: Notes Toward a New Caribbean Cultural Studies.” *Small Axe* 7, no. 2 (2003): 23–38.



“language is not everywhere equivalent in communicative role and social value,” Abrahams sought to “indicate [performances of decorous and indecorous speech behavior’s] ramifications in other areas of Vincentian peasant culture.”<sup>129</sup> Abrahams posits speech—the ability to speak in two distinct ways at socially appropriate moments - -as a primary source of social capital, where the two pertinent manners of speaking include, but are not limited to, Standard English and Creole English. Sense is defined by Abrahams as “elevated diction, an elaboration of stylistic feature, and an approximation of standard English speech patterns, with an emphasis on the demonstration of fluency and the display of knowledge, both in the form of facts and effective arguments.”<sup>130</sup> If sense is an ideal, nonsense juxtaposes sense by departing from it in “perceptible” ways. Meaning, nonsense is characterized as a deviation from effective logical argumentation, “being hesitant or indecorous in speech performance, or being totally out of control of the language, that is, making noise.”

Acts or performances that are sensible or make sense represent the highest ethical and moral ideals of the community—decorum.<sup>131</sup> Performances of knowledge, which are inseparable from the act of being well spoken, are also regarded as sense. Related to sense in a similar way is the act of talking sweet or good, where one who talks sweet uses Standard British—or American, depending on the speaker’s age—English, and practices clear, concise enunciation. There is an understood relationship between talking good or sweet and acting or performing good, juxtaposed with talking broad—using broken, or other anti-sensible language-- which typically is one aspect of acting bad. While nonsense is discursively and theoretically regarded as bad and morally

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<sup>129</sup> Roger D. Abrahams and Richard Bauman, “Sense and Nonsense in St. Vincent: Speech Behavior and Decorum in a Caribbean Community,” *American Anthropologist*, 73, no. 3 (June 1971):762-772.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 770

undesirable, “the community recognizes the need, on certain occasions, to channel certain of the motives implicit in the nonsense behavior. . . in the form of performance occasions.”<sup>132</sup> Traditionally, carnival has functioned as one such occasion of sanctioned nonsense. It is important to note that while the sense-nonsense opposition features both types of performances as equally integral to the cohesiveness of the community, it is the nonsense behaviors that elicit the most discussion and comment.

### **Nonsense and Being Fast in The Eastern Caribbean**

In St. Vincent a speech act may be considered nonsense because of its inappropriateness. The super loquaciousness that characterizes traditional tea meetings, though intentionally hard to follow, is considered a prime example of sense because it is an exaggerated performance of, and allusion to, the order and rationality of formal logic and argumentation during the appropriate time (and at the assigned venue) for that type of speech. Abrahams’ consideration of speech in St. Vincent and Nevis as performance lays a theoretical foundation for my argument that speaking, and more conventional acts of music-making, occupy very similar spaces within the social economies of these small Caribbean islands. Performance is also a viable bridge between mediums because the local discourse about music’s appropriateness, respectability and relationship to intelligibility are similar to those found in speech. It is equally likely for a Kittitian or Nevisian to comment on a skilled demonstration of colloquial speech or a particularly pleasing musical performance as “sweet.” Abrahams argues, speech and music are regarded similarly as performance acts within the Small-Island Afro-Caribbean:

Everyday communicative behavior is judged on the same terms as more stylized performances. Little distinction is made between those formally and obviously structured expressive performances—such as singing a song, dancing, or telling a folk tale—and ordinary expressive interactions. Thus while there would be no confusion in the community between a Carnival song and an everyday argument,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 764

they would be recognized as being related to each other as controlled contest forms and evaluated as performances.<sup>133</sup>

Along with recognizing varied performances of this sort as participating in the same types of evaluative judgment economy in the Afro-Caribbean, time and place were acknowledged as fundamental factors in both the performer and the audience experience—and integral to any analysis of either. In the early 1960s, folklorists recognized earlier studies as lacking because, outside of an analysis of form, and the ethnographic collection of raw data, there was little attempt to understand the ways a performance or “expressive object achieves [its] affect.”<sup>134</sup> In 1964, Alan Dundes’ article “Texture, Text, and Culture” presented “structure of context” as the missing element of folkloric inquiry.<sup>135</sup> As Roger Abrahams explains, “Examination of ‘structure of context’ calls for an analysis of the relation between the participants in an esthetic transaction (in actors and observers) as the relation is modified by time and place and occasion.”<sup>136</sup>

This emphasis on time, place, and occasion offers an additional bridge between speech acts and music acts given that the venues and occasions in which the speech economy operates are, generally, the same for music performances and speech performance in St. Kitts and Nevis. Similarly, the importance and frequency of public speech performances, like musical performances, reaches a high point during the months of December and January. Christmastime (Mid December to Early January) the peak of the tourism season, occurs simultaneously—and quite deliberately—with the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 80

<sup>134</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, “Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 81, no. 320. (April 1968): 143-158.

<sup>135</sup> Alan Dundes, “Texture, Text and Context,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 28, no. 4, (1964): 251-265

<sup>136</sup> Abrahams, “Introductory Remarks,” 146.

historical time for both religious (Christian) and carnival (secular) celebration.<sup>137</sup>

The importance of time, place, and occasion within small island Anglophone Caribbean societies such as SKN is especially important to understanding the sense-nonsense opposition as both denotative and evaluative. Because nonsense acts are “the most tendentious and potentially destructive,” they may also “release the greatest amount of social energy... [energy that is] feared when it arises in a disordered and inappropriate frame of reference.”<sup>138</sup> Meaning, that even nonsense must be performed and experienced within appropriate channels such as Tea Meetings, rum shops, market stalls, and carnival parades. And nonsense is to be enacted in conventional and predictable ways.<sup>139</sup> The folk taxonomy of nonsense is a naming of nonsense acts that “function[s] as a means of controlling them and the motives that give rise to them.”<sup>140</sup>

Consider the tempo spectrum from slowest to fastest, as mentioned above, and recall that “too fast” does not exist at the extremity of the spectrum but, instead exists within the tempi that are fast, but not fast enough to be conceptualized or perceived as occurring at a slower, interpretable rate. It is my suggestion, here, that with regard to performances of sense and nonsense in the Leeward Islands, being too fast—as a socially performed act—does not refer, necessarily, to the highest degree of outlandish behavior. Instead, being “too fast” is nonsense behavior that is enacted via historically unconventional channels. Like within cognitive studies of tempo, to be “too fast” is to not make sense, however, quite unlike within cognitive science, being “too fast” in St. Kitts

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<sup>137</sup> Roger Abrahams makes a similar point about the importance of seasons to various types of performance. He recognized the while the “Man of Words” character could be found among black communities across the Americas, “performance occasions for Nevisians were not the same as those I had found in Philadelphia; rather, they were tied to certain times of the year and to community occasions of fun-making.” Roger D. Abrahams, *The Man-of-words in the West Indies: Performance and the Emergence of Creole Culture*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), xix.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 96.

and Nevis requires an integral emphasis on sense as necessarily locally defined. If, in St. Kitts and Nevis, sense and nonsense are tied directly to local conceptions of decorum, being too fast—both musically and socially—is a matter of the way a particular performance, as defined broadly above, is positioned in relation to decorum.

It is important to reiterate here that Roger Abrahams' work on decorum, which grounds much of my own thinking, was based on ethnographic fieldwork done in the Richmond Park section of the Eastern Caribbean islands composing St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG). Much of the applicability of Vincentian research to a Kittitian-Nevisian context is justified by its inclusion in a seminal text that sought to provide answers to what in the late 1950s and early 1960s remained “the black question”—an extension of the scientific and political interest in African retentions in New World contexts.<sup>141</sup> The very similar historical trajectories of SKN and SVG further support my argument for the mutability of Abrahams' research to a Nevisian and Kittitian context. Abrahams recognized the main “variable factors” that affect the resulting expressive traditions on any one island: “the differences arising from who settled the island, what was cultivated there and for how long and intensively, where its slaves originated from, what markets the plantations served, when manumission occurred, whether nonblack workers were brought in, and so on and on.”<sup>142</sup>

Attention to these details reveals a very similar historical background for both of these relatively new sovereign nations. Prior to European invasion, ‘Caribs’ and Arawaks inhabited both SVG and SKN. Both island groups would move between French and British rule after their initial “discovery” by the Spanish. The battle between European settlers and indigenous Carib populations in St. Vincent lasted almost into the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., xviii

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., xxi

century-- much longer than on St. Kitts or Nevis. And the cultivation of sugar In St. Kitts-Nevis was a much larger part of that islands' history and economy than on St. Vincent. However, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British ruled both island groups, granting them various changes in their colonial status until they were both granted associated statehood in 1967.<sup>143</sup> SVG received full independence in 1979 and St. Kitts-Nevis followed behind, receiving independence in 1983. With regards to manumission and the subsequent importation of many non-black workers, slavery was abolished in both SVG and SKN in 1834, and in the years after, many Portuguese workers were imported to both islands to replace the cheap labor force.<sup>144</sup> Each aspect of their parallel histories is strongly related to their collective British colonial legacies.

Decorum as a guiding principal is deeply rooted in the legacy of British colonialism in the Caribbean. Decorum's importance is made even clearer when recognized via analysis of the linguistic culture upholding it. Linguistic culture, an alternative to what has been called "language," is defined by H. Schiffman as

the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture. Linguistic culture also is concerned with the transmission and codification of language and has bearing also on the culture's notions of the value of literacy and the sanctity of texts. And of course language itself is a cultural artifact and must be counted as a part of linguistic culture."<sup>145</sup>

Discursively, "too fast" is a descriptive valuation and categorization that is heavy laden

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<sup>143</sup> Along with St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Kitts-Nevis (also then associated with Anguilla), Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, and St. Lucia also received associated statehood status in 1967.

<sup>144</sup> Joseph Spinelli, *Land Use and Population in St. Vincent, 1763-1960: A Contribution to the Study of the Patterns of Economic and Demographic Change in a Small West Indian Island* (Ph.D dissertation University of Florida, 1975), 232.

<sup>145</sup> Harold Schiffman, "Language Policy, and Linguistic Culture" in *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, Thomas Ricento, ed, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 112.

with the “cultural ‘baggage’” Schiffman describes. Here, I follow Stuart Hall’s use of “discourse,” which he describes as a Foucauldian understanding: instead of referring to any one cohesive speech or conversation or even one statement, discourse refers to “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about –i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.”<sup>146</sup> Within the discourse, all of the individual statements “fit together because any one statement implies a relation to all the others: “They refer to the same object, share the same style, and support ‘a strategy... an institutional ...or political... drift or pattern.’”<sup>147</sup> In this instance, the cultural baggage within the language ideology is the Colonial Matrix, and the ‘object’ of reference for the discourse is wylers music, with British colonial respectability via decorum as the institutional and political pattern.

### **Too Fast in St. Kitts and Nevis**

Considering that the importance of speech to the social economy of the Leeward islands extends beyond its communicative role, I consider the polysemy of the term “too fast” a lens for examining the music scene in St. Kitts and Nevis and the discourse that surrounds it. This approach seems even more suitable for the context of St. Kitts and Nevis given that manners of speaking, rhetoric, and speaking about speaking are integral to interpersonal relations framed by acute attention to decorum as the prevailing colonial frame of respectability. The way someone speaks (where, when, and to whom) can, and often does, determine social status and limit or allow certain important freedoms. This is true both for high or upper class portions of the society and for casual,

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<sup>146</sup> Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power.” *Formations of Modernity*. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, eds. (London: Polity Press, 1992), 201.

<sup>147</sup> Mark Cousins and Arhar Hussain, *Michel Foucault*, (New York: Macmillian, 1984), 84-5 quoted in *Ibid*.

low-class, or private interactions.<sup>148</sup> This can likely be said for many different societies; however, the institutional and cultural effects of the plantation society created a condition in which the literal survival (access to food, clothes, a social network, or even the legal recognition of heterosexual family ties) depended on effective use of and navigation between sense and nonsense speech.

In Karen Fog Olwig's ethnography of a Nevisian family, immigrants working and living abroad recounted the importance of non-familiar acquaintances to provide food, small amounts of money, and other bare necessities. As such, maintaining relationships and upholding a sense of community through appropriate speech performances and interactions—of both sense and nonsense-- was a matter of survival. For instance, one could likely depend on an Anglican priest for assistance, after demonstrating piety and reverence through a particular use of the Queen's English. Fanny Coker, for example, a freed mulatto slave on the prominent Pinney plantation in Nevis during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the daughter of a black slave and a white plantation worker. She was schooled by one of her master's daughters and, after moving with the family to Bristol, England, "gave a most intelligent and pleasing account of the work of God upon her soul, and was accepted as a candidate for Baptism" in the Anglican church.<sup>149</sup> The correlation between sensible speech and appropriate spiritual conduct as is presented in the case of Fanny Coker was likely a connection not lost on other blacks in Eastern Caribbean plantation society. Moreover, the connection between sensible speech, respectability, and access to goods (as well as other social freedoms), predicated on the boundedness of religion, education, and speech, was also likely very obvious.

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<sup>148</sup> As an example, during the late 1960s—an important moment for the British Caribbean, marking the independence of many of the larger colonies--much of the dissent from the lower classes toward the first Chief Minister was fixed around his propensity to speak with a British accent coupled with his decision to marry a white woman.

<sup>149</sup> R. Hayden, "Caleb Evans and the Anti-slavery Question," *Baptist Quarterly*, 39 (2001), 4–14



The Methodist church (and later the Anglican church) in St. Kitts and Nevis provided the first spaces for blacks to participate in a sector of respectable society. Karen Olwig notes, “The Methodist mission, by advocating sexual restraint, a decent family life, proper manners, and decorum among the Black and colored population, was seeking to institute a kind of life which was highly valued among influential segments of English society at the time and therefore had to be accorded a certain amount of respect by the white population in the English colony.”<sup>150</sup> Within the groups of missionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who sought to forward ameliorative and abolitionist politics, there was an overarching desire to portray blacks as humanly equal members of Caribbean society. In the Methodist church, “social order equality and respectability were so closely linked that failure to live a respectable life meant exclusion both from human society on earth and from God’s heavenly kingdom in the eternal life promised in the great yonder.”<sup>151</sup> I suggest that this greater emphasis on speaking as part of the social capital gained through living a respectable lifestyle, and the very local polysemy of terms that span the continuum between speaking, singing, noise and music and their always prominent relationship to social vectors such as respectability and postcoloniality can shed light on the larger issues attendant to music and its perception.

That I highlight the slippages between the various meanings of the term “too fast” does not mean that I am suggesting that there is an unconscious, or accidental pun or play on words on the part of my interlocutors. As Kevin Brown has noted with regard to Caribbean rhetoric,

Even though many Caribbean people hold that their language varieties—varieties some of them speak exclusively—are broken, improper, and inferior, their code-switching performances are steeped in rhetorical intent that can be traced to their

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<sup>150</sup> Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity*, 68.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

collective cultural identification. The choice either to creolize the standard or standardize the creole signifies attempts to use language as a tool to broach critical conversation in recognized or recognizable terms to facilitate discourse.<sup>152</sup>

Recognizing the rhetorical intentionality of speech acts, I consider the various conceptions and designations of “too fast” as deliberate and informed indicators of a historicized yet shifting local and global context that lay ground for today’s unconventional channels for extra-nonsense behavior.

The answers that people provided when I asked them what they mean by “too fast” point to both standard English and Creole conceptions of “too fast” that ultimately hinge on decorum and an understanding of the sense-nonsense opposition. These answers have elucidated a particular history regarding nationalism, women, respectability, colonialism, and tourism. My aim is to survey the shifting terrain of that context and its parameters through an examination of the polysemantics, and linguistic ideology and culture of “too fast” itself.

Scholars interested in African diasporic communities, particularly African peoples in the Caribbean, have taken this polysemantic approach in the past. Paul Gilroy's discussion of the word "work" within black diasporic communities is demonstrative in this connection. To Gilroy, the ability of the word "work" to refer to labor, sex, and dancing alludes to the black body's ability, indeed, its propensity, to be “reclaimed from the world of work” as “a symbol of freedom from the constraints of the discipline of the wage.”<sup>153</sup> As an extension of this type of work, Mimi Sheller's text on

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<sup>152</sup> Kevin Adonis Browne, *Tropic Tendencies: Rhetoric, Popular Culture, and the Anglophone Caribbean* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 41.

<sup>153</sup> Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991) quoted in Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 267.

freedom and citizenship in the Caribbean, uses the many meanings of the words “below” and “bottom,” to put forth a re-imagining of Caribbean history. Considering the word “bottom,” and its reference to things such as lower classes of people and women’s behinds, Sheller refocuses popular Caribbean history with embodied freedom and sexuality as its center.

Like these works, I am aligning my focus on polysemy with local performance practice, and language ideology, with ethnography as a central component of my discussion. By taking this approach to the intentional and inherently political polysemy of "too fast," I suggest that the application of the term "too fast" to Kittitian and Nevisian popular music is not only a commentary on the upbeat tempo, but also, much like the word "work," a window onto the entangled political, social, and economic implications of the music (its creators and audiences) and local conceptions of fastness. With a polysemantic view, one can see how within the Kittitian Nevisian community “too fast” is both a state of being and a denotative and evaluative statement that highlights the community’s relationship to Western logic and the coloniality of being. First, however, it is important to understand how the Western logic of coloniality has appeared as a universal logic within Black, small island Caribbean communities, and how this logic maps onto relative perceptions of tempo as multi-sensory (heard and felt—generally perceived) and social.

### **Definitions of “Too Fast”**

In the spirit of Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman’s charting of the folk taxonomy of nonsense, the following is a description of the prominent local definitions of the term “too fast.” Much like other terms that, throughout history, have shifted and expanded their meanings, the various usages of the word “fast” are, themselves, connected in numerous ways. While my separation of their definitions is somewhat

artificial, this approach to polysemantics mimics the ways the term “fast” is used and understood in different contexts. It is my aim to articulate both the difference in semantic meaning the term can take on, and the historical and contextual overlaps that bolster the meanings of “too fast” via fast music as varied yet linked

### **1. Untimely Participation**

Using youth as the scape goats—or, as Lincoln Williams has called them, the “folk devils” of a society—is not unique to St. Kitts and Nevis, or even to the Caribbean. The current, post-independence political moment in St. Kitts/Nevis, however, is characterized by an emphasis on issues surrounding the ongoing task of postcolonial nation building. St. Kitts and Nevis’ transition from associated state to free and independent nation has erected a prominent, historically more discernable generational barrier between the youth and the old. Here, the youth refer to those who are born around or whose adolescence coincides with SKN’ gaining full independence in September of 1983. It is not coincidental, then, that wylers music—gaining popularity in the early-mid 1990s—is widely considered music for and by “the youth,” despite the fact that many of the band members are in their late 30s and early 40s now. The “youth” which, like fastness, has become a discursively defined category, are regarded as the means for social reproduction for the nationalist ideals of St. Kitts and Nevis, and official documents about the youth support this view.

The idea that the youth must be guided, taught, and reigned in from their “natural” predisposition for crime and immoral performances of identity expression—especially with regard to music, dance, and clothing style—is both a de facto sentiment and de jure political platform in St. Kitts/Nevis. The reigning political party in St.

Kitts/Nevis, The Labour Party, published a “Youth Manifesto” in 2000 stating “the urgency to satisfy this need [for expression of identity] forces them to think only of the here and now and to use whatever cultural artifacts, such as clothing, consumer goods and music to announce their presence. The energy generated to satisfy this primordial need is part of the definition of youth.”<sup>154</sup> In recognition of this inherent proclivity the Manifesto states, “The St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party understands the need for young people to assert their collective identity and will therefore facilitate this essential process in ways that are socially acceptable.” In this light, wylers musician’s perceived untimely participation in the act of music making, itself, is just one of the ways in which they are socially unacceptable. And controlling the “youth” —both through praise of certain behaviors and the castigation of others---for the proliferation of nationalist ideals is just one means of cultural reproduction, the control of sexuality and gender relations represents another.

## **2. Female Improprieties, Postcolonial Nationalism, and Sexuality:**

The term “fast” as colloquialism crops up repeatedly in an 1859 dictionary of slang entitled *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words: Used at the Present Day in the Streets of London* compiled by John Camden Hotten, a publisher from London. The entry for fast reads as follows:

Gay, spreeish, unsteady, thoughtless,—an Americanism that has of late ascended from the streets to the drawing-room. The word has certainly now a distinct meaning, which it had not thirty years ago. Quick is the synonym for fast, but a quick man would not convey the meaning of a fast man—a person who, by late hours, gaiety, and continual rounds of pleasure, lives too fast, and wears himself out. In polite society a fast young lady is one who affects mannish habits, or

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<sup>154</sup> “Youth Manifesto” 2000, quoted in Lincoln Williams, “The Official Discourse on Youth in St. Kitts” Accessed August 16, 2013  
<http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/BNCCde/sk%26n/conference/papers/Williams.html>.

makes herself conspicuous by some unfeminine accomplishment,—talks slang, drives about in London, smokes cigarettes, is knowing in dogs, horses. An amusing anecdote is told of a fast young lady, the daughter of a right reverend prelate, who was an adept in horseflesh. Being desirous of ascertaining the opinion of a candidate for ordination, who had the look of a bird of the same feather, as to the merits of some cattle just brought to her father's palace for her to select from, she was assured by him they were utterly unfit for a lady's use. With a knowing look at the horses' points, she gave her decision in these choice words, 'Well, I agree with you; they are a rum lot, as the devil said of the ten commandments.' Charles Dickens once said that 'fast,' when applied to a young man, was only another word for loose, as he understood the term; and a fast girl has been defined as a woman who has lost her respect for men, and for whom men have lost their respect.<sup>155</sup>

The exact meaning of the word as a slang term is not particularly clear. This is especially evidenced by the fact that the word “fast” is used repeatedly in its own definition. We can, however, garner two things that are significant for the current discussion. First, while “fast” and “quick” are synonymous in their pertinence to the passage of time or the rate of unfolding in a piece of music, the word “fast” additionally references a type of deviation from social norms. Second, this definition, with regard to the regulation of the public behavior of women, underscores the existence of a proper type of female Englishness or a respectable female prototype.

In the Caribbean British colonies where the mandates of respectability had not only racial ramifications, but also gendered consequences, English female respectability referred to both conceptual and embodied ideologies. In this way, manners of being female respectably—or proper womanhood—were defined most directly by the European standards referenced in the definition. Here we can think notably of the spectacle of Saartjie Bartman (Venus Hottentot) whose decidedly un-European body was seen as particularly noteworthy (offensive) because of its difference. Another example can be

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<sup>155</sup> John Camden Hotten. *The Slang Dictionary: Etymological, Historical, and Anecdotal*, (London: John Camden Hotten, 1860), 159.

seen in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European travel documents about the naked bodies of slave women. Female slave bodies, as objects of ethnographic gaze, are described as both sexualized beings and work-animals--telling of the twisted hypocrisy of slavery, where, justified by the logic of coloniality, black women's bodies were consumed in so many different ways that accusations of rape or murder were hard to pin down and easy to dodge.

Respectability, as an aspect of colonial nation building, has long been recognized as an inherently gendered project. As vectors of power and subjugation, gender, along with race, class, and sexuality, are mutually constituted as important parts of creating and maintaining the balance between difference and sameness on which the nation as an imagined community<sup>156</sup> is predicated.<sup>157</sup> In addition to Peter Wilson's respectability vs. relation binary discussed above, two other important polarized and ambivalent dualisms of colonial life highlight the gendered notions of nationalism through respectability. Antonio Lauria's 1964 article on interpersonal relations in Puerto Rico, for example, uses ethnographic study of Puerto Rican males to define two interrelated aspects of what he calls Puerto Rican national character. For Lauria, *Respeto* (respect) and *Relajo* (relation) constitute the types of interactions Puerto Rican males engage in within the national imaginary. More notably, Partha Chatterjee (1993), like Peter Wilson in the Caribbean, characterizes periods of colonial nationalism in India through use of separately gendered notions of intertwined social characteristics. As Shalini Puri has suggested, the "crab antics" of the Caribbean, the ambivalence between respectability and reputation, can be seen as analogous to that of the private and public.

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<sup>156</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>157</sup> See George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* and Brackette Williams, *Women Out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

Most importantly—and, perhaps, most problematically—respectability and reputation refer directly to the feminine and the masculine within Afro-Caribbean society. Chatterjee, in his discussion of women and the nation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal suggests a similar division between men, women, inside, and outside in relation to respectability. Positing the Indian nation as broken into the spiritual and material—representing the inner and outer, respectively—Chatterjee asserts that anti-colonial nationalism in India was upheld by a series of inter-connected dualisms. Women, as protectors of the inner sphere of Indian daily life—homemakers, child-bearers, and practitioners of piety—maintain the “true self” of Indian-ness in the context of the imposition of colonial modernity on tradition. For Chatterjee, ghar, or the inner (traditional, female, spiritual, and truly Indian) is juxtaposed with bahir, the outer (modern, male, material, and worldly). It is through the interactions of the two that Indian anti-colonial nationalism was created and maintained.

While the gendered similarities do say something about the pervasiveness of the sexualization of political and social aspects of colonization globally, the contrasts are equally instructive for teasing out the particular brand of gendered colonization in the Afro-Caribbean. Specifically, one point of note is that the different roles men and women played in India and the Afro-Caribbean are suggestive of differences in colonial rule and its gendered manifestations in its second wave of indirect rule of an already settled Indian population. Meaning, Afro-Caribbean women are not seen as the guardians of anticolonial nationalism through their maintenance of pre-colonial traditions. Rather, (reputable) Caribbean men are seen as upholding the anti-Imperial values and social practices that lead to the development of an anti-colonial nation. On the other hand in India, men accepted the superiority of Western technology and a particular kind of hierarchy, rather than an eschewal of it. Indian women are seen as safe-keepers of the



private spirituality of anticolonial Indian nationalism. In both cases, women maintain a peculiar place in the burgeoning anti-colonial nation.

If, historically, the static black female body—the very idea of her body-- is embroiled in local politics of respectability, then the contemporary, mobile black female body becomes even more entangled in the principles supported by the colonial web of power and being. This is not only true for the migrating, working, socioeconomically mobile woman, but also for the dancing black Caribbean woman. Indeed, her dancing body, moving in sync with music is, at once, participating, resisting, subverting, and reinforcing notions of respectability that are implicit in her individual movement to the music in a particular physical space. Carnival’s “local, national, and diasporic marketing constructs itself largely through the bodies of black women, as available (tourist) fantasies... engag[ing] in a colonialist alignment of ‘native’ women’s bodies with passive sexual consumption.”<sup>158</sup>

Wylers music generally employs a generic gendered, sexualized rhetoric that is characteristic of much carnival music around the Caribbean. Songs refer to big or broad female backsides, often instructing women to move, wuk up, and wine in various ways. Carnival music elicits a response from young women that includes explicit, skillful enactments of sexual intercourse. Occasionally, young women who identify as heterosexual will engage in sexualized dancing with other women, where, anatomically speaking, one woman will take on the role of the male and the other will dance as the female. Women I spoke to suggested that they felt more comfortable dancing and “showing off” with a female friend because there was no pressure for the behavior to

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<sup>158</sup> Samantha Pinto, “ ‘Why Must All Girls Want to Be Flag Women?’: Postcolonial Sexualities, National Reception, and Caribbean Soca Performance.” *Meridians* 10, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 137–63

occur outside of that moment. These types of dancing, along with the lyrics that describe the sexualized movements, are seen as “too fast.” The local aesthetic values regarding “fast” or “slow” dance moves suggest that faster moving hips and backsides are more deliberately sexual and energized through their mobility. Public, female, bodily mobility, pitted against the Western logic of black bodies as static, emplaced, and slow is perceived as “too fast.”



**Figure 8 Women dancing together during carnival 2010-11. Photo by author**

By this point, I have presented the colonial matrix of power --and its attendant links-- as the historical and epistemological backdrop to Kittitian-Nevisian understandings and uses of the designations “fast” and particularly “too fast.” If public condemnation of wylers music is a byproduct of coloniality, wylers music itself and acts

that align themselves with the music, can be understood as decolonial. As presented below, decolonial aesthesis, the specific branch of decoloniality enacted via artistic endeavors, best describes popular music in SKN.

### **Decoloniality as A Frame: Decolonial AestheSis**

The colonial matrix of power as understood by Walter Mignolo, is a system of control and domination enacted in the sixteenth century through the colonization of the New World that continues today. Aesthetics figures as one aspect of that matrix as it was transformed and expanded in the eighteenth century.<sup>159</sup> Tied directly to Kant's 1791 theories of aesthetics and teleology presented in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* or Critique of Power and Judgment, Mignolo posits that aesthetics

Emerged from European experience and local history, and [...] became, even already in Kant's work, the regulator of the global capability to "sense" the beautiful and the sublime. In this way, aestheTics colonized aestheSis in two directions: in time, it established the standards in and from the European present. and, [sic] in space, it was projected to the entire population of the planet. Aesthetics and reason became two new concepts incorporated in the colonial matrix or power.<sup>160</sup>

Kant's theories "served to legitimize the 'superiority' of European arts and aestheTics."<sup>161</sup> *Aesthetics colonized aesthesis*, which we can understand as the base perception or sense of stimulation—the varied and necessarily local and contextual human acts of sensing and experiencing. While both words have Greek roots, rendering them initially void of colonial meaning—occurring before the invention of either Europe or coloniality,

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<sup>159</sup> Mignolo, "Colonial Wounds" (July 2013) *Social Text: Periscope*  
[http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/#sthash.C0vElv3s.dpuf](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/#sthash.C0vElv3s.dpuf)

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

colonial Enlightenment theory later created the European notion of aesthetics as the universal standard of sensing and being in the world.

Decoloniality, then, as the intentional expression of varied histories, localities, and relations to the global with the ultimate goal of dismantling the colonial matrix of power, re-employs and re-legitimizes aesthesis over aesthetics. Decolonial aesthesis is a faction of the larger decolonial movement (as aesthetics is a subpart of the colonial matrix of power) that seeks to identify and make visible challenges to modern iterations of colonial aesthetics:

Decolonial aesthesis starts from the consciousness that the modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception. [...] Decolonial aesthesis is an option that delivers a radical critique to modern, postmodern, and altermodern aesthetics and, simultaneously, contributes to making visible decolonial subjectivities at the confluence of popular practices of re-existence, artistic installations, theatrical and musical performances, literature and poetry, sculpture and other visual arts.<sup>162</sup>

Alanna Lockward has suggested that in the vein of Antonio Benitez Rojo's seminal text describing the plantation-system mentality, *La Isla que se Repite* or *The Repeating Island*, Caribbean artists choose to "challenge the coloniality of knowledge and being"—via decolonial aesthesis—through various "possibilities of sensing that strip the hegemonic supremacy of modernity."<sup>163</sup> I posit that wylers, a genre of Kittitian-Nevisian music that is described and understood by its tempo or more readily by its too fastness, and thus is the product of the musicians' and audiences' privileging of local, anti-colonial means of sensing, perceiving, and *being* in the world, can be best

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Alanna Lockward, "Black Europe Body Politics: Toward and Afropean, Decolonial Aesthetics *Social Text: Periscope* (July 2013), [http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics/#sthash.YHe6OP2H.dpuf](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics/#sthash.YHe6OP2H.dpuf)

understood as an example of decolonial aesthesis. Inherent in decolonial aesthesis is the de-universalizing and ultimately the decolonization of colonial aesthetics —which we can understand in this case as an Imperial approach to music and musicianship. In this way, unlike in resistance-centered approaches to Caribbean music, we can imagine the instances of musical borrowing from Western idioms not solely in terms of compliance or even subversion but as individual appeals to another, local aesthesis. Colonial aesthetics sans the premise of universality is thus decolonial aesthesis.

Decolonial aesthesis provides a useful frame for discussing wylers music as a representation of an alternate approach to tempo, and ultimately colonial respectability. Other approaches to discussing local Caribbean music-making often focus on the music's role as "resistant" to the everyday values of European respectability. Using "resistance" as a frame does recognize applicable musical performances as existing in opposition to understood Europeanness. However, in taking coloniality as a whole, these approaches do not take into account the particular aspects—or links, as Mignolo would suggest-- of the colonial matrix against which specific performances of anti- or un-coloniality work. Further, as resistance has become a fixture of Caribbean studies, so, too, have the acts "resistance" references become arguably compliant extensions of colonial mandates of comportment. Certain modes of Caribbean bacchanalian expression have come to represent the expected and accepted modes of performed resistance, which I propose, for some parts of the Afro-Anglophone Caribbean, is perceptually, and analogously socially, understood as "fast." Decoloniality, on the other hand, recognizes the oppositionality of Kittitian and Nevisian music practices that employ and legitimize local manners of perceiving and sensing that move beyond "fast" as the sanctioned extension of colonial aesthetics, and conceptually inhabit "too fast." To be "too fast," then refers to the perceptual and social practices—with uninterpretable tempo as their referent--that are

decolonial in their existence outside of and in contradiction to the universal notion of coloniality and colonial aesthetics.

Within current discussions of female respectability in the Anglophone Caribbean, the pervasive argument is that professionalism has replaced traditional, colonial respectability. My suggestion is that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and, instead, present two of several options (mixtures thereof) utilized by Afro-Anglo-Caribbean women. The “openness” with which decoloniality has been described, that stands in direct contradiction to the universality of colonial aesthetics, provides a useful framework that allows for the simultaneity of professionalism and respectability where they are employed against aspects of the colonial matrix. Further employing decolonial aesthetics as a frame for Kittitian-Nevisian music (broadly understood), the following chapters take up two particular links of the colonial matrix-- social reproduction, and circulating notions of musicianship through formalized education; and female respectability.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### UNTIMELY PARTICIPATION AND DECOLONIAL SONIC SPACES

On Thursday December 27, 2012 I sat at the newly erected outdoor bar at the tourist ship marina in the heart of Basseterre. Because no tourist ships had docked at port Zante that morning, the bar was surrounded by local black men drinking Carib beers and mixed drinks of local rum and soda, which was a decidedly different picture than the one I had seen three days earlier. The signage that advertised “Rasta Rum Punch” and “\$1 Sex on The Beach Shots!” had been pushed to the side, and the walkway that, 72 hours earlier, had been a busy promenade for bikini-clad, sun-reddened tourists was virtually empty-- save for a few local women in work uniforms sitting on benches that offered a shady spot for an afternoon meal. I quickly realized that my presence as a young black woman sitting at the bar alone (without a male companion) was conspicuous when a man who appeared to be in his late twenties pushed a hot bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken in front of me and asked, “You want a piece of chicken?” I declined and smiled. “Let me buy you a drink,” he responded. Recognizing the local social rules attendant to money, drinks, and seemingly single females I declined that, too. He insisted and bought me a peardrella.<sup>164</sup>

Upon hearing in the few words I spoke to him what amounted to a non-Caribbean accent, my interlocutor, who asked me to call him “Chocolate”—a reference to his very dark skin—exclaimed “You on vacation! Take a real drink!” His insistence that my very presence in St. Kitts and especially at port Zante indicated that I was there to play—which included drinking alcohol in the middle of the afternoon-- is characteristic

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164. A locally-made pear flavored carbonated beverage.

of the way Kittitians and Nevisians have long thought about the space and the people surrounding them. This, of course, is not unique to St. Kitts-Nevis and is a social result of the ubiquity of the tourist industry in the Caribbean. I explained that I was in St. Kitts doing research on local music-- “band music.” One of Chocolate’s friends seated a few tables away yelled, “what she lookin’ for?” Without missing a beat, Chocolate, smiling, suggestively thrust his hips forward and responded, “she lookin’ for that ‘ding, dinga, ding.’”<sup>165</sup> Both Chocolate and his friend laughed hysterically at the joke. This type of interaction between Kittitian-Nevisian men and myself was not unusual. After the laughter dissipated, Chocolate told me there was someone making “great music” just a few feet away.

Port Zante, like most tourist ports, is lined with merchants selling the types of wares that cruise ship passengers purchase—t-shirts with the islands’ name, food, jewelry, and cheap liquor-- and in St. Kitts, South Asian (occasionally via Guyana or Trinidad) and Taiwanese merchants own most of these tourist stores. The “ire Store” is one of the few locally own shops on port Zante that, playing on the extremely successful “i” product line popularized by Apple, sells pricey, non-tourist St. Kitts-Nevis merchandise such as t-shirts with “869” (the St. Kitts area code) and jackets and bikinis that read, “St. Kitts: Est. 1492.” Offering additional novelty items such as high-heeled shoes, makeup, costume jewelry, false eyelashes, and CDs of local music, the physical location of the iRep store and the merchandise it sells, together, have come to represent a center for local, youth culture. Chocolate brought me to meet one of the store’s

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<sup>165</sup> Lorna McDaniel, in her text on Big Drum music, has described a similar orientation to sexual gesturing and everyday conversation in Carriacou saying, “The greeting ‘How is it?’ may be accompanied with a genital gesturing. When asked about this extreme familiarity, culture bearers remarked thoughtfully to me that ‘all things cannot be explained; it must be love’” Lorna McDaniel, *The Big Dum Ritual of Carriacou: Praisesongs in rememory of flight* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1986), 177-178.



managers, a rapper by the name of Dagah, who was happy to speak to me. When I told him I was researching local music, he immediately began listing a diverse array of artists who influenced his own work included Stevie Wonder, and The Beatles. When I told him I was interested mostly in “band music” he told me that he doesn’t necessarily “like” the music—he wouldn’t choose to listen to it individually outside of a carnival context, but because of its connection to big drum and fife music (which everyone associates with untouched Kittitian culture and history), he feels compelled to dance to it in certain arenas and during Christmas time. He commented that even though lots of people “love to jump up and dance and party to it for carnival, a lot of people don’t really *like* it. Like, the *music* music itself is dumb.” In probing him for an explanation of what he meant by “dumb” Dagah explained that the guys who play it “aren’t really musicians, for real,” they just learn how to play what they need to in order to perform the band’s songs. More to the point, Dagah pointed to a stack of Nu Vybes CDs, noting that they “don’t sell” because very few people outside of DJs and those who live abroad seek to own this music or to listen to it outside of the Carnival season.

He compared the abysmal wylers CD sales to the moderate success of his own career, a high point of which was the offer of a partnership contract with Slip n’ Slide records in 2011 that eventually fizzled when, as Dagah recounts, “They wanted me to put up half the money and they would do all the promotion for any projects we would work on. At the time I didn’t really understand so I thought they were playing me, a meeting was to be scheduled, but never came through, then things slowly died out with that situation.”<sup>166</sup> Dagah lamented that he knows a much larger Kittitian and Nevisian audience would appreciate his music if they were open to the idea of a Kittitian hip-hop

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166. Dagah, Personal correspondence, November 8, 2014.

artists. Young people in St. Kitts more easily accept local artists who make reggae or soca than Kittitian-Nevisians who seek to adopt contemporary American styles such as hip hop and R&B, although they are happy to consume American hip hop and R&B that is produced outside of SKN.<sup>167</sup> In hopes of creating a local “urban music” record label, Dagah was working closely with another young Kittitian artist in St. Kitts, Dejour, sixteen years old at the time, who was pursuing his own career and performed regularly as both a background singer and as a solo artist during Dagah’s shows. I recognized Dejour’s voice as providing the crooning R&B vocals that adorned many of the hip hop tracks on Dagah’s CD—which was already playing in the store when Chocolate and I arrived. During my time standing at the front counter of the iRep store, Dagah mentioned several times that his and Dejour’s detractors say that their performances are not “real hip hop” and that people from St. Kitts-Nevis cannot be “legit” in their rap performances. In response to that, Dagah noted that he believes as a black, English-speaking man he is “entitled” to hip-hop and should be welcomed to participate in its culture without restriction or question. He added, “Guys like Eminem and stuff, white rappers, or French African rappers-- I deserve to do hip hop more than them. Hip hop is more mine than theirs.” Dagah’s comments about himself as an artist, wylers musicians as musically uneducated or limitedly skilled, and his questioning of the Kittitian-Nevisian public’s reception of his hip hop performances as unauthentic, beg the question, whose music gets to be taken seriously in SKN and to what end? Thinking about the broad range of commentary on wylers musicians I had encountered alongside Dagah’s comments; I wondered if the uneven terrain on which decisions of inclusion and

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167. The politics of acceptance and geographical proximity have been discussed by Timothy Rommen as the “negotiation of proximity.” Timothy Rommen, *Mek Some Noise: Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 66.

exclusion into hip hop/rap mirrored decisions about determining notions of musicianship in St. Kitts-Nevis. In other words, who gets to be considered an artist or musician? And on what terrain are these determinations of authorized musicianship (and authorized music) made?

These types of questions have already been asked within the context of other Caribbean genres. Shannon Dudley, for example, describes the long road steel pan players in Trinidad faced in order to be considered legitimate musicians amongst Trinidadian artists. Much like the case of wylers in SKN, the steel pan was hardly considered capable of creating a sound that was considered actual music in the early years of the instrument's development.<sup>168</sup> As an extension, steel pan players were not, initially, considered musicians. Many of the people who I witnessed reveling in Jouvert morning celebrations and who happily attended several performances at varied locations across the island were reluctant to use the term "musician" to refer to wylers band members and producers. They also failed to recognize any level of notable skill necessary to play wylers music. As an extension of this type of music being "too fast" even people who generally enjoy wylers in a particular context couch their ambivalence about its merit as a genre of music and, relatedly, the legitimacy of the musicians who play and produce it, in language and concepts fortified by the logic of coloniality.

The logic of coloniality is inextricably connected to the "rhetoric of modernity," which can be understood as the Western idealization of modernity and the modern as the universal aspiration. The logic of coloniality, then, is the continuing hidden process of subjugation and devaluation that is necessary for modernity. In Mignolo's words,

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<sup>168</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Aesthetics and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

This logic of coloniality is implied in the racialization of people, languages, knowledges, religions, political regimes, systems of law, and economies. Racialization of the sociohistorical spheres on a world scale means to degrade whatever does not correspond with the imperial ideals of modernity, and to persecute and shoot whoever disagrees with the racial classification of the world. That hidden logic, the logic justifying shooting and killing in the name of modernity, is precisely the constitutive logic of coloniality.”<sup>169</sup>

The logic of coloniality, in relation to artistic productions, is evident in the promotion of colonial aesthetics, where colonial aesthetics are manifested in the creation of categories of inclusion and exclusion for both creative productions and their creators. Walter Mignolo locates this history, as outlined in Chapter Two, within eighteenth century Enlightenment thought. In Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, aesthetics became a branch of philosophy concerned with universal perception of the beautiful, and with the artist as genius: “*Art* (from Latin *ars*), which means simply skill, derived from *poiesis*, which in Greek meant *to make*, becomes coupled with aesthetics: the skill of the genius to make artistic objects embracing beauty.”<sup>170</sup> Here I argue that the discursive critique that posits wylers as “too fast,” concomitantly indexes wylers’ position in relation to colonial aesthetics’ conception of art and skilled genius. Colonial education and the legacy of coloniality that informs even (and especially) post and anticolonial reforms of colonial education structures are the historical mediators between seventeenth century philosophy and contemporary music-making practices in SKN. It is my assertion that as decolonial efforts are directly linked to supporting alternative anti-modern modes of knowledge and being, the register in which conceptions of musicianship are linked to coloniality relates directly to colonial education regimes.

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<sup>169</sup> Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, “The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality” in Revathi Krishnaswamy and John Charles Hawley, Eds. *The Postcolonial and the Global*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>170</sup> Walter Mignolo, “Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings” *Social Text: Periscope* (July 2013) [http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/) Accessed 3 January, 2014

Sustained by the social reproduction of colonial ideals, both explicitly and implicitly, wylers music and practitioners are seen as unauthorized in their musicianship and engage in what I call *untimely participation*. Wylers musicians are excluded from musicianship by way of untimely participation as a category that is legitimized by colonial logic via colonial patterns of thought and speech. When my interlocutors call wylers music and musicians “dumb” and “nonsense” they are using colonial aesthetic values, grounded in a sort of rhetoric of modernity (progress).

Unauthorized musicianship is defined as a negative or lack of authorized musicianship. The following case studies present local authorized musicianship discourses as the norm against which wylers is excluded. Here we see colonial aesthetics that does not just create a hierarchy of “good” music versus “bad” music; instead wylers is the unauthorized non-music (or noise) in relation to real (colonially authorized) music played by authorized musicians. In the following discussion, untimely participation is utilized as a frame for discussing how people think and talk about what musicians are, and what musicians do in St. Kitts-Nevis. Where the logic of coloniality is the hidden flip side of the rhetoric of modernity, untimely participation as a categorical product of that logic, can also be seen as a local artistic strategy for decolonial aesthesis. Ultimately, I posit untimely participation as an example framework for the type of decolonial musicianship through which sonic practice of decolonial aesthesis is enacted. By delinking from the discourse and from modes of authorized musicianship, wylers practitioners create a sonic and physical space for the type of fast music generated via decolonial aesthesis.

The following is broken into three parts. First I will outline the types of authorized music and musicians that circulate in St. Kitts-Nevis. Secondly, I draw a comparison between 1) the narrative of Valentine Morris—a celebrated steel pan

musician and brass arranger for the military band to colonial education regimes; and 2) the musical narrative of David Freeman, an octogenarian fife player from Nevis who is lauded as a practitioner of “indigenous” Kittitian-Nevisian music, and anti/postcolonial reform efforts. Taken together, these narratives represent the two concurrently available avenues for authorized musicianship in St. Kitts Nevis. Lastly, I discuss wylers as a “too fast” genre that deploys its untimely participation as a vehicle for decolonial aesthetics.

### **Authorized Musicianship and Coloniality**

I began each of these interviews by asking my interlocutors to tell me about his “musical journey.” In synthesizing their responses, I suggest that the moments that constitute the musical narratives Morris and Freeman relayed are comprised of the salient and meaningful features of the chronology of their musicianship. As such, I see these fragments as coalescing around symbolic, locally informed understandings of what it means to be a musician. The ways that Freeman and Morris construct and present themselves as musicians are denotative of the means by which their respective musicality has been celebrated and their musicianship authorized in the larger community. The social and political status quo in SKN is, as outlined in chapter two, characterized by the binary inherent in reputation vs. respectability. If African/indigenous Afro-Caribbean and British attributes most closely represent those two poles, respectively, then the two available frames for musicianship in SKN, too, fall into these categories. Further, however, the discursively constructed classifications of the types of artistry presented by Morris and Freeman follow channels of the logic of coloniality. Representing the rhetoric of progress (music advancing society) and global legitimization through historically based nationalism (focus on what is “indigenous” and very old), respectively Morris and Freeman are case studies of these two colonial

standards of musicianship that, together, account for the totality of authorized musicianship discourse in SKN.

### **Valentine Morris**

Valentine Morris recalls the Christmas of 1949 during which a man known locally as “Barba Rat” was the first to publically perform on the Steel Pan during Carnival with accompaniment by drums and bugles played by members of the Defense Force Band. The “ping pong,” as the steel pan was called in its early days, was a fascinating new instrument that had a particular appeal to Caribbean, “make do” sensibilities because of its being fashioned out of oil drums. It was via exposure to the steel pan that Morris began taking personal interest in creating music outside of the mandatory musical instruction offered in primary schools. He remembers that Barba Rat played the familiar tune, “Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie,” an English nursery rhyme that was among the exclusively European musical selections that were taught to school children. “He would play from here to down the road and then he would stop and then the defense force would play [bugle calls on] the bugle. But it was in lines back then. People would jam in lines.” After that initial experience with the steel pan, Morris was inspired to create his instrument in its likeness. Through trial and error Morris began “tampering to make a pan out of a cement drum (which is made from steel that is much thinner than an oil drum).”<sup>171</sup> By carnival of 1950, the year following the introduction of steel pan to the St. Kitts-Nevis carnival scene, there were steel pan bands representing each of the different neighborhoods around the island. Morris’s band, “The Boston Tigers” was one of many pan ensembles that were named after iconic American products such as “The Coca Colas.”

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<sup>171</sup> Valentine Morris, Interview, December 31, 2012.



**Figure 9 Valentine Morris (left) with friends and handmade steel pans circa 1950. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**

Despite the steel pan's immediate popularity among black lower and middle classes, it was not until 1955 that steel pan music was accepted as a legitimate form of music fit for consumption outside of a carnival setting. Much of the ambivalence toward steel pan music was due to the type of people it represented. Morris remembering the hardship he faced in trying to find performance venues as a steel pan player, noted, "These "so-called 'upper-class' people didn't want to have no part of it [steel pan music]." In the 1950s, the paying gigs for local musicians outside of the small tourist scene, were largely held in schoolhouses and were sponsored by elite, largely white or mixed-race Kittitians with political and financial power who. People in that socioeconomic and racial group "wanted the orchestral music. The steel pan had young black people playing it. They didn't want that."<sup>172</sup> In 1952 The Boston Tigers had received a few opportunities to play for free at these types of dances in order to gain exposure. It was not until 1955

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<sup>172</sup> Morris, Interview, December 31, 2012.



when what Morris calls “the breakthrough” occurred: The elite classes “realized that classical music could have been played on pans. That’s how we broke through... After that, there was always a combination of steel band and orchestra at the dances and we played classical and semi-classical pieces.”

At the turn of the decade, Morris made the decision to “move on.” Most steel pan players in the 1950s were using *tonic sol-fa* (or tonic sulfur as it is often called in SKN) a British method of teaching songs using solfege syllables and moveable “do” as their primary method of teaching, learning, and arranging steel pan songs. Morris’s decision not to “stay there like that,”—largely fueled by a desire to learn how to read music, led him to accept lessons from Edgar Challenger in the early 1960s. Challenger was a schoolteacher, prominent historian, and, later, would become one of the first elected officials to serve under the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla government.<sup>173</sup> Morris and several other boys learned to play the trumpet under Challenger’s instruction. After spending years learning the trumpet, Morris created the “The Val Morris Orchestra,” a ten-piece ensemble that played popular dance band music from around the region—which, through its involvement with American and European tourism, was heavily influenced by American dance band music.

The Val Morris orchestra began touring internationally in 1973, as the first band from St. Kitts to go overseas to New York to perform. In an attempt to make a living as a musician in St. Kitts, Morris went to Kent, England’s “Royal Marine School of Music in 1975, to take an attachment course on how to manage a military band. Later, Morris took a job as the leader of the same Defense Force Band that introduced him to the steel pan. Now retired, Morris has volunteered at different high schools and churches on the island

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<sup>173</sup> Anguilla was part of an associated state with St. Kitts and Nevis from 1967 to 1980.

where he assists in musical instruction and helps to write grants to various agencies, such as UNESCO, for assistance in purchasing instruments.

### **David Freeman**

The musical experiences of David Freeman of Rawlins Village Nevis are examples of the promotion of old or indigenous genres as part of postcolonial efforts to combat the historical devaluation of African-derived art forms. Freeman, now in his eighties, continues to perform the fife with his string band during carnival celebrations on Nevis. He is often asked to present during cultural demonstrations on and off the island, in his words, “if they want Nevis-St. Kitts music they always calling on David and the Honeybees.”<sup>174</sup> In addition to local “cultural” performances, Freeman has served as a musical ambassador for traditional Kittitian-Nevisian music throughout the Caribbean noting he has played on all the Caribbean islands from “Here (Nevis) to Cuba and back again.”<sup>175</sup> Freeman begins the narrative about his own musicianship with his father. In stark contrast to the modes of European music tutelage, Freeman describes his musicianship as an organic development tied to a fascination and a love for local string band and fife and drum music, and traditional Christmas sports. While Freeman’s musical trajectory exemplifies recent post-colonial, anticolonial cultural preservation efforts as noted above, he and his music had long participated in similar projects before independence. Freeman was one of several local instrumentalists who were recorded as

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<sup>174</sup> David Freeman interview January 5, 2013. “The Honeybees” is the name of Freeman’s current string band ensemble.

<sup>175</sup> Cuba plays an interesting middle-role for the transcaribbean legitimization for Afro-caribbean music and dance forms. The first Jamaican dance hall queen, Carlene Smith, was recognized as a major talent after she was embraced in Cuba. Cuba figures prominently in narratives about international, circum-Caribbean travel as a place where black Caribbean music forms are usually well received and their reception there is perceived as a major accomplishment. Freeman noted that Cuban audiences could “hear themselves in the big drum.” For more on Anglophone Caribbean music genres in Cuba see Sujatha Fernandes, *Cuba Represent! : Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

part of folklorists Alan Lomax and Roger Abrahams' 1962 field recording trip to the West Indies. Lomax's political intentions for that trip included preserving local art forms and providing tangible and audible evidence of the cultural similarities of the Caribbean islands as additional support for what would later be an ill-fated Federated Caribbean. While being memorialized in such a manner in the early 1960s would appear to be a major accomplishment for someone in Freeman's position, Freeman conceded that he did not remember the occasion of Lomax and Abrahams' field working visit. Freeman responded, "I don't remember that. Really, I just love to play. If someone asks me to play, I play." As a young boy, Freeman very succinctly describes his trajectory as follows:

My father was a fifer. He had a string band and I loved it. It did sound so nice I had to put it in my head. I played with the older young boys, listened what they say and look at what they do. Then when I got jealous enough I started my own band when I was around 15. I been going on and on since then.<sup>176</sup>

Unlike Morris and many of my other interlocutors, Freeman does not see wylers music as "too fast" because "string bands can play that fast, too." However, he did describe a discontinuity between old forms (string bands, fife and drum bands, and masquerade bands) and wylers. Specifically, Freeman expressed concern about the technology inherent to wylers such as electronic instruments amplified by large speakers that makes the music too loud for acoustic, traditional bands to compete with. Freeman suggested that the physical absence of these types of "indigenous" Kittitian-Nevisian music forms from the carnival scene was prefigured by their sonic exclusion. Now, as Freeman sees it, these folk genres can only be heard in spaces created by tourism.

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<sup>176</sup> David Freeman, Interview, January 5, 2013.



**Figure 10 David Freeman with Fife in his front garden. Photo by author.**

Both of these narratives appear to exemplify European and African social and artistic values respectively. Morris' emphasis on European classical music forms such as the waltz and the minuet as mechanisms of legitimization of the steel pan as an indigenous Caribbean instrument championed by low class, black youth could be characterized as an appeal to colonial aesthetics as tied to colonial respectability. On the other hand, David Freeman displays an adherence to a mode of musicianship that stays close to traditional, or what would be considered "indigenous," modes of learning the fife (via his father and as a consequence of his incidental proximity to that type of music-making). This combined with a stress on freeman's *love* of the music and his instrument, as well as an emphasis on the ways in which his music and musicianship are representative of true or authentic and indigenous Kittitian and Nevisian music, are

generally indicative of the types of attributes that are heralded as continuities from SKN's meaningful African past.

An appeal to the African roots of Caribbean cultural productions has been a staple of mid-twentieth century nation building efforts. Thomas Turino has called this “use of art and other cultural practices to develop or maintain national sentiment for political purposes,” cultural nationalism.<sup>177</sup> Cultural nationalism, as Michael Largey explains, is “not simply a matter of stirring nationalist sentiment for patriotic display; it is a means for dealing with the contradictory nature of nationalist thought.”<sup>178</sup> This “twin paradox of nationalism and cultural reformism” is characterized, first, by a dependence of and trepidation toward surrounding cosmopolitanism, and second by a similar tenuous relationship with local distinctiveness that has the potential to “create potential rivals in its own territory.”<sup>179</sup>

I suggest here that these two types of authorized musicianship— conceived of as “colonial” versus “African”— are both constructed in the epistemic and ontological spaces (spaces of knowledge and being) that were presented as the only possibilities for artistic expression where “art” and “music” are strictly defined— herein lies the logic of coloniality. It is important to note that I am not making a suggestion about ignorance or unenlightened thinking that informs the understandings of musicianship presented by Morris and Freeman. Instead I am interested in the structures that were and are in place— coloniality—that created and maintained these ideas about aesthetics, education, and consequently, musicianship.

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<sup>177</sup> Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

<sup>178</sup> Turino, *Nationalists*, 15-16 in Michael Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>179</sup> Turino, *Nationalists*, 16.

The narratives of Morris and Freeman, and much of the history of musical activity in SKN is connected to schools as spaces for cultural reproduction within classroom settings, venues for popular music and dance performances, and an area of local culture that has seen tangible and traceable changes in relation to those islands' moves through colonization, statehood, independence, and the post independence era. In this way, schools and education reforms are directly related to and representative of the rhetoric and ideas that support untimely participation as a category of non-musicianship. In classifying three types of musicians that are recognized by Western music education practitioners, Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez has noted

The particular view of what it means to be a musician that dominates music-making and therefore music education implicitly frames the artist as playing a critical role in the reproduction of the social and political status quo. It is not that musicians do not play a complex social role, but that the dominant view of what it means to be a musician that informs music education tends to ignore this complexity while contributing to social injustices, such as gender and class oppression, and the further marginalization of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities.”<sup>180</sup>

Similarly, it is my suggestion that within post-independence SKN, the dominant attitude that governs the inclusion of particular types of artistic producers into the category of musician, too, is guided by an understanding of musicians as implicit in social reproduction. Where “respectability” and “reputation” (talking sweet and talking broad, European versus African) as discussed in Chapter Two, are the guiding frames for *being* in SKN, musicianship that falls outside of these frames is, in effect, not musicianship at all. The logic of coloniality empowers colonial aesthetics to exist not only as a guide for judging the quality of a piece of music or musician, but also as a determinant for the very conception of creative production and creative practitioners as music or musicians. The

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<sup>180</sup> Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez, “Wherefore The Musicians” *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 18, No. 1 (Spring 2010):65-84, 69.

following discussion of Colonial Education and subsequent reforms in SKN present an historical context for these two modes of authorized musicianship and for wylers as an example of unauthorized musicianship through its untimely participation.

### **Colonial Education and Postcolonial Reform**

The on-the-ground and lived experience of colonial aesthetics in SKN was manifested through and sustained by social reproduction in the form of public education. Joseph Halliday, a former chief education officer in St. Kitts notes,

After the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the absorption of the Catholic population into Protestant British St. Kitts, the English language was made compulsory in all church schools, as a counter-active measure to wean children from the corruption of French influence and mannerism. Thus early in [Kittitian-Nevisian] history, powerful forces were emphasizing the expediency of instituting schools as culture agents.”<sup>181</sup>

Not only was the education in schools (namely, access to Formal British English) a type of social and economic commodity, but also the entire education process—gaining access to a school—was largely an economic issue:

Planters, seeing the success of the Moravian missions in discipline and productivity of the negroes on the estates likewise invited the Methodists to establish schools on their plantations and called for a programme of indoctrination in the virtues of industry, sobriety, honesty, faithfulness and obedience. In other words a moral curriculum was a relevant and powerful tool for the social economic and political exploitation and stabilisation of slave societies[...] With the subsequent erection of the Juvenile School in Charlestown Nevis, by the Methodist church, ‘The girls and boys were taught either reading, writing or Arithmetic, and the girls the use of the needle. The Payment made by parents differed according to what was taught from half a bit to a bit and a half a month or from two pence to sixpence.’ Rote learning was free, thus the church in spite of its best intentions, had introduced the notion that the type of curriculum pursued should depend on parental ability to pay.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Joseph J. Halliday, “The Struggle for Curriculum Relevance,” paper presented at The St Kitts and Nevis Country Conference, May 2000  
<http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/BNCCde/sk%26n/conference/papers/JHalliday.html> Accessed September 22, 2013

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

Education for blacks remained a capitalist commodity and thus also a doubly powerful symbol of status until 1975 when public education became free for all citizens.<sup>183</sup> Though this change occurred during the pre-independence moment, it came well into the nation-building project.<sup>184</sup> After emancipation, and continuing until 1975, not only did Kittitians and Nevisians have to pay for basic education beyond religious instruction, but children were also mandated to own certain material affects in order to attend school. During the early 1930s, things such as shoes and a uniform were hard to come by for the average citizen and, in this way, school or any formal education was unattainable for most people who were not considered at least middle class—another economically structural effect of colonization and the plantation system.<sup>185</sup>

Washington Archibald, a long-time educator and public intellectual in St. Kitts, has suggested the one of the main foci of the colonial education system was to keep the hierarchy of the plantation system in place. Writing of his time as a pupil at the Basseterre Boys School, Archibald notes that Colonial values have long been ingrained and passed along via pedagogical social reproduction regimes, many of which included music and singing as vehicles:

One of the attributes of a promising teacher in those days was his ability to sing well enough for the boys to accompany him. The school had no musical instrument, so each singing-teacher had to strike the tuning fork to give us a pitch and use his voice to give us the tune...There was a characteristic feature of these songs. The purpose of teaching them could not have been music appreciation. The purpose was indoctrination. That's why we had to learn these songs by heart and store them in our memories so that by the time we grew up

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<sup>183</sup> The Education Act No 18 of 1975 stipulated that free and mandatory education would be provided by the government to all children between the ages of 5 and 16.

<sup>184</sup> Scholars, taking the Caribbean as a region, recognize the postcolonial era to have begun closer to the end of the 1950s and toward the beginning of the 1960s with the full independence of islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad. While small islands lagged behind in receiving full independence, the pro-black sentiments, and buzz surrounding political autonomy was widespread in the area.

<sup>185</sup> An informant in Karen Olwig's ethnography of Nevis recounts, "we didn't have to dress up for church or wear shoes. We might stray if we had to have money for dress and shoes." Olwig, *Caribbean Journeys*, 172.



our minds would be full of British imagery, British loyalty. The purpose was achieved in all the generations of colonial education. When I sang at home the songs I had learned in school, my mother remembered every one of them and some that was not taught[.] Not all of our songs were of the military patriotic type. There were the softer airs also, songs about the wind, how sweet it sang, murmuring over the lea in cadence sweet and low; and songs about the rain; but it was British wind and British rain. We never sang one song about a hurricane or about the ghauts, which ran in almost annual regularity from Money Hill and Shadwell Mountain, through Basseterre into the sea. But we knew from our songs how gently Sweet Afton flowed, and we did not even know where, In England, Wales, and Scotland or Ireland, Sweet Afton was.<sup>186</sup>

Historically, there has been an emphasis on scientific and mathematical proficiency that precluded recognition of musical and artistic talent as serious or academically rigorous. Throughout the better part of the twentieth century Kittitian and Nevisian education was geared toward examinations and scholarships in Britain and, thus, “convey[ed] utter disregard for local context” which included music instruction that surveyed exclusively European music forms.<sup>187</sup> Edward Kamau Braithwaite has described Caribbean colonial education in saying,

What our educational system did was to recognize and maintain the language of the conquistador, the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher. It insisted that not only would English be spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean, but that the educational system would carry the contours of an English heritage. Hence...Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen—British literature and literary forms, the models which had very little to do, really, with the environment and the reality of non-Europe—were dominant in the Caribbean educational system.<sup>188</sup>

I argue that the prevailing understanding of wylers practitioners as not fully embodying attributes of authorized musicianship is, in part, a relic of these realities. The colonial hierarchy of art that puts black artistry on the bottom and, further, puts musicianship under other types of knowledge, constitutes the figurative conversation and

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<sup>186</sup> Washington Archibald, *Reflections on an Epic Journey* (St. Kitts: W. Archibald, 1993), 35.

<sup>187</sup> Neva Marley Pemberton, “Exploring Postcolonial Curriculum Reform in St. Kitts and Nevis: A Case Study (University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 99.

<sup>188</sup> Edward Kamau Braithwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984), 262-263.

contextualizes the prevailing discourse in and through which wylers musicians are seen as erroneously or, at best, prematurely participating.

The mid 1990s saw the culmination of The St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Education's decades long effort to counteract the history of this type of colonial-minded education in SKN.<sup>189</sup> Moving from a crown colony to an internally autonomous associated state in 1967, St. Kitts-Nevis education officials were concerned with moving from the grammar school system (that required entrance exams for admittance to secondary school) to a comprehensive education system. After independence in 1983 and in the following decade, anti/postcolonial curriculum reforms incorporated the history and performance of indigenous music—largely conceived of as steel pan music, calypso, and masquerade—into local primary and secondary school instruction. These efforts that sought to promote the importance and legitimacy of local forms did, I suggest, present an additional context for an accepted form of musicianship or artistry—one that was based in knowledge of old music forms. The 1992 *State Paper on Education Policy* supports this view of music's role in education reform as it pertains to social reproduction via the “development of [a] cultural identity”:

The impact of the colonial history on the development of national cultures is a familiar scenario throughout the region: the majority the population, descended from former slaves and indentured labourers. These people's cultures were subordinated to the European, and in more recent times, North American culture. The result of this can be seen in lack of self- confidence, low productivity, attitudes of dependence, eagerness to emulate other cultures while denigrating what is local, and in the absence of a sense of national commitment... There is now before us the urgent task of fashioning a Cultural Identity. We shall have to research out past, to better learn and understand our traditions and their origins; we must keep alive useful practices such as folklore medicine. Government will support with the necessary funding and timetabling, a long term programme

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189. These efforts started in 1970 when the Organization for Cooperation in Overseas Development (OCOD) implemented a program through which SKN's curriculum became connected to Canada's in an effort to move toward a more child-centered method of teaching in order to rid SKN's education system of anti-black, elitist methods that were leftovers of the plantation system. See Pemberton, “Exploring Postcolonial Curriculum Reform,” 5.

introduction the Arts and Culture into the schools beginning from primary through to secondary levels . . . [and] promote to a greater extend, school bands using indigenous musical instruments and develop the musical thrust in schools.<sup>190</sup>

The counterpart to the type of musicianship promoted by colonial education is an extension of this type of privileging of old forms and the conflating of indigenous music and instruments with contemporary national culture. The types of tutelage, rituals, and the skills that constitute mastery or musicianship framed by cultural identity, reflect practices and genres of the static past and continue to delegitimize current local forms and practices— especially those attendant to wylers. As Homi Bhabha has noted, “The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past.”<sup>191</sup> Considering these circumstances of colonization and pillars of coloniality as the grounds on which wylers musicians are regarded as unauthorized in their artistry, the following discussion elucidates the connection between fastness and too fastness to untimely participation. Here I describe how the colloquialisms that classify certain sounds, tempos, and social behaviors as “fast” can be broadened to include types of unauthorized musicianship.

### **The Logic of Coloniality and the Untimely**

The Anglophone Caribbean use of the term “fast” (or “fass”) and the socially unacceptable behavior it indexes is often portrayed, usually with comedic intentions, within other mediums of Caribbean art. In the glossary of Helen Gilbert’s anthology of

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<sup>190</sup> Government of St. Kitts and Nevis Ministry of Education, Youth and Community Affairs, *State Paper on Education Policy*, 1992.

<sup>191</sup> Homi K. Bhaba, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 203.

Postcolonial plays she provides the definition for the word “Fass” as “interfering, meddlesome, quick to interfere in others’ business.” The term itself is used in a play by the Jamaican feminist theater group initiated in the late 1970s, The Sistren Theatre Collective. Within the piece entitled, *QPH* (1981), a female character chides another for “meddling” in private family business. In a similar manner, “The Sleeper,” a short story by G. Modele Clark, typifies the social dynamics implied in calling someone (or something) fast, or too fast. Within the text, Bull Head, a young Trinidadian man, has made a habit of attending local dances on Saturday nights with the express goal of searching out a young woman to take home and bed. After finding a much older potential companion, Ellen, at one of the band performances held at a school house—which is common practice across the Caribbean—Bull Head laments that the band always plays “ole people music.” Ellen responds, “Well you an’ yuh padners don’t have no music sense... Sel [the band leader] does play all kinda music. He playin’ classics, blues, kaiso, everyting. An’ he does play it wid so much feelin’, man. Yuh does could feel de music deep down inside.”<sup>192</sup> The interaction between Ellen and Bull Head closely resembles the types of intergenerational dialogues, oftentimes manifested as exasperated monologues on the part of older musicians. The notion that good musicians can play, and are well versed in many types of music—always including Western classical music and traditional Northern African American genres—is prevalent amongst Kittitians and Nevisians who regard wylers as “too fast.” Further, Ellen’s response invokes the Man of Words, sense vs. nonsense dichotomy as discussed in Chapter Two. Here, Bull Head is described as not having music sense and, therefore, as being unable to appreciate the band that Ellen describes as playing in a manner that can be “felt.” The mastery with which the musician

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<sup>192</sup> G. Modele Clark, *Up in Mahaica: Stories from the Market People* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 55.

plays each instrument is, in turn, connected to the musician's skill in interacting spontaneously and emotively with other musicians. Clark goes on to describe the musical moment that Ellen urged Bull Head to "feel" the music. A guitar solo begins to play the beginning of "Warsaw Concerto":

Richard's solo was not rushed or frantic but was a steady and deliberate showcasing of his mastery of the instrument and his knowledge of the music. He appeared to be almost detached from everyone else in the room, the curve of the guitar nestled into his crossed leg as his fingers danced deftly across the fret board. Meanwhile, Gordon Besson on bass and drummer Terry Reyes discreetly held down the rhythm while Kevin Mitchell's piano inconspicuously filled the space with delicately applied chords. As tenor saxophonist Victor Koward and bandleader Sel Duncan picked up their instruments, Richard surrendered the spotlight and graciously melted back into the fabric of the music.<sup>193</sup>

The intergenerational tone of Clarke's story continues as Ellen and Bull Head discuss the details of Ellen's personal life. After Bull Head inquires about her finances, Ellen retorts, "Young boy, is fass' yuh fass' so? Yuh does axe more questions dan a magistrate." In this interaction we see being fast or "fass" distinctly as an older person's critique of the social behavior of the young. Here, as in St. Kitts-Nevis, being "fass" (and too fast) constitutes an unauthorized intrusion. Where music is concerned, as Ellen's character describes, failure to showcase the types of mastery or sanctioned and celebrated musicianship described above, is also regarded as "fass" in its improper or, as I refer to it, *untimely* participation. The origins of this type of untimely participation as a social idea that grew out of the legacy of colonization can be gathered from the history of the word "jeps."

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

“Jeps” is one synonym for “fast” within some parts of the Anglophone Caribbean and the term has been argued to be a derivative of the word "gypsy." While the strong Roma presence in 18 and 19 Century British Caribbean colonies is a generally neglected aspect of colonial history, the history of Romani descendants in the Caribbean is telling of early race relations in the West Indies:

The notion of Gypsy is well established in the West Indian folk tradition, though no more accurately here than anywhere else in the world. Wright (1938) tells of the panic the arrival of Gypsies in Jamaica caused earlier in this century. The word itself turns up in several of the island creoles, variously meaning "playful," "frisky," "meddlesome," "mischievous" and "bossy." In both Jamaica and Trinidad, it also refers to 'pig Latin', a secret way of talking; in the related dialect of Sierra Leone, where Jamaicans went to settle in 1800, it has come to mean a "short person." Similarities between some proverbs in the same creole with those in Romani have also been noted.<sup>194</sup>

To be “jeps” is to speak authoritatively on a subject without the proper social license to do so. Additionally, someone who is “jeps” minds others’ business and gossips freely. Much like some low-class whites, and later free Africans and East Indians, European “Gypsies” were shipped to the Caribbean as a source of inexpensive and easily exploited labor.<sup>195</sup> Upon their arrival, Romani were generally regarded as an ambiguous racial group, speaking a non-English language, and practicing decidedly un-British customs, much like the African slaves and very small community of Indigenous Aborigines already present there. In this context, being "jeps" (gypsy), or "fast" referred to defying the mandates put forth based on social, political, and economic status. Extending this terminology, one may say a child is “too fast” if he or she speaks or acts in a manner that is not appropriate for children. Generally a child that publicly displays precociousness,

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<sup>194</sup> Ian F. Hancock, *Grammatical Sketch of Louisiana Creole French*, privately-circulated monograph, 77 quoted in Ian F. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1987), 96.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. It should be noted here that the term “gypsy” is pejorative and the correct term to refer to people of Romani descent is Roma or Romani. My use of the term “gypsy” is exclusively etymological.

speaks during adult conversations, or demonstrates social knowledge that is not related to formal education, is considered “too fast.”

Jeps, fass, and too fast do not reference morally depraved or universally *wrong* behavior. Instead, these terms point to behavior that would be better suited in the future or in another setting. The misconduct is not the act, itself, but instead that someone without authorization performs the act. What is also implied then, is that one may be allowed or even encouraged to participate in this type of performance after a type of transformation or individual, circumstantial change occurs. One may grow (in the case of the child), or assimilate, in the case of the Roma. If this type of fastness, that I call *untimely participation* that refers to the taking of liberties that are not yet afforded, then a parallel can be drawn here between the perceived fastness of Kittitian-Nevisian popular music. Much of the commentary about wylers band members focuses on their lack of formal musical training and their haste in failing properly to learn an instrument and related music theory. Essentially, their fastness is related to their perceived inappropriate performance of public, artistic intervention.

Much of these debates in St. Kitts-Nevis surrounding whether or not wylers band members and producers are, indeed, musicians—that is to say, artists worthy of recognition because of their contribution to music—hinge, in the long view, on coloniality’s gatekeeping of aesthetics. Where wylers is understood as noise, silly, rubbish, and “*just something to jump up to,*” wylers’ creators, while making music, are not quite imagined as musicians in their own right. The flip side of this, however, is not that wylers artists are necessarily looking to be acknowledged as musicians within this context. Indeed, it is their apathy towards these types of issues that constitutes one of the more effective channels for decoloniality.

## Untimely Participation and Decolonial Aesthetics

In a 2014 documentary put together by the St. Kitts Ministry of Culture in cooperation with UNESCO, Mention, a singer in the Nu Vybes Band, responds to a question about the interventions that wylers makes to St. Kitts-Nevis as “modern” music:

Music is music. There’s nothing new under the sun so to speak, just a different time. Music was there from the foundation and we evolve with time and there might be certain adjustments to the music because of certain advancements. Wherever there’s advancement there’s a certain amount of change. This music still remains *the music*. I respected it back then and see it as the same now. It’s modern, yes, because of the time but sometimes you listen to music today and you can hear the influence [from] yesterday. So there’s a difference but not that much of a difference to speak in terms of “modern.” Because what is modern?<sup>196</sup>

Mention’s disavowal of the term “modern” to describe wylers is an intriguing point of entry for analysis of wylers musicianship and music as decolonial. At base, there is the correlation between this type of talk about wylers and the main tenants of decolonial theory and praxis as they pertain to the exposure of the logic of coloniality that posits coloniality and its linkages as the dark underside of modernity. More, however, Mention’s position on wylers as *the music* and his understanding of that music as the product of a “different time” is, I argue, an assertion that marks not only chronological time but also a broad ontological orientation to time that can be understood as an appeal to decolonial aesthetics. Where (Kantian, colonial) aesthetics is understood as a part of the colonial matrix of power and is “a normativity that colonized the senses, decolonial aestheSis has become the critique and artistic practices that aim to decolonize the senses, that is, to liberate them from the regulations of modern, postmodern, and altermodern aestheTics.”<sup>197</sup> Wylers musicians are not insisting that they be regarded as musicians as they are colonially understood, enacting the process of decoloniality referred to as

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<sup>196</sup> *The Cultural Music of St. Kitts and Nevis*, UNESCO, video, 2014.

<sup>197</sup> Mignolo, “Decolonial Aesthetics” [http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/#sthash.bihZOF1r.dpuf](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/#sthash.bihZOF1r.dpuf)



delinking, where “delinking is the reverse of ‘assimilation’.”<sup>198</sup> They are also not invested in teasing out the particular African lineage—history— that has been utilized as another form of legitimization for black art forms through the postcolonial period (as exemplified in the musical narrative of David Freeman). Instead, their resistance to colonial aesthetics is manifest not only through wylers’ sonic presence—loud, moving, inescapable— but also through a disinterest in modern aesthetic categorizations, in progress, and in the modern-- those categories indexed by a negative critique of untimely participation.<sup>199</sup> Now that I have laid out the dimensions of musicianship that are authorized by tenants of colonial aesthetics socially reproduced via colonial and postcolonial-nationalist education reforms that code certain behaviors and sounds associated with wylers as untimely and thusly unauthorized, I turn to untimely participation as channel for decolonial aesthesis that privileges a multiply coded and different orientation to time, especially fastness.

Both Valentine Morris and David Freeman describe authorized genealogies of musicianship that include either official tutelage under a respected musician (Morris) or a familial association that supplanted British, musical training with what has become a fetishized understanding of Africanized method musical apprenticeship fortified by blood ties (Freeman). Both of these methods of musical learning and education are predicated on and legitimized by an understanding of time that privileges a slow-simmered approach to artistry. Here, *raw* talent is harnessed and very gradually transformed into skill worth publicizing as musicianship. During our interview,

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<sup>198</sup> Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity," 461.

<sup>199</sup> Elizabeth McAlister discusses a similar orientation to loud, pre-show music in Haiti: “Loud music made the air thicker, and it shaped the space into a pulsating, vibrating, energized place.” “Listening For Geographies: Music as Sonic Compass Pointing Toward African and Christian Diasporic Horizons in the Caribbean” *Black Music Research Journal* 32, No. 2, (Fall 2012) 25-50.

Valentine Morris described the difference between older musicians and the current crop of would-be instrumentalists in saying, “

See I do a little teaching still... and we started with a good number of persons, maybe 20-25 and they gradually began to drop out because they come here and think, ‘in two weeks time I can play something.’ They don’t understand it takes time. That is it: they don’t have the patience. They don’t love it enough. They just want to play something—it can’t go so.<sup>200</sup>

Here Morris emphasizes patience and a substantial time investment as a prerequisite to “play[ing] something.” In invoking a different time, I argue, wylers practitioners embrace an artistry that includes and even privileges a faster approach to learning and creating music. The genealogy of digital music equipment that encourages wylers artists to quickly acquire and utilize new technology, as outlined in Chapter One, is just one aspect of wylers music creation that exemplifies this type of fast music. “Jamcrew,” a wylers producer in St. Kitts who has created *riddims* for carnival music artists in St. Kitts and St. Lucia, described his musical trajectory as beginning with informal jam sessions in school:

In second form (the 8<sup>th</sup> grade) we were always banging on school desks (1998). The Band room had a steel pan. A very old, rusted steel pan. What we would do is set up all the desks like a stage. One of the desks sounded like a bass and the pans still had some tones on them and we just made up a little thing like the small axe [band] guys and sang some of the popular chants, and the whole school would go crazy! The women? The girls? They went crazy! The guy doing the pan rhythms made them [pans] talk. There were about 3,000 students in the school and they were all there.<sup>201</sup>

For Jamcrew, that type of impromptu musicianship begot additional instances of fast and almost immediately public music-making when “a friend in the college who was majoring in computer science ... burned a copy of Fruity Loops for [him].”<sup>202</sup> He began

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<sup>200</sup> Morris, Interview, December 31, 2012.

<sup>201</sup> Leonard “Jamcrew” Lestrade, Interview, December 5, 2014.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

experimenting with wylers beats and songs created on his computer that he uploaded to Caribbean-centric websites such as [smallislandmassive.com](http://smallislandmassive.com) and [islandmix.com](http://islandmix.com) where they were disseminated across the Caribbean, especially amongst islands of the Eastern Caribbean. The expedited process of music creation and dissemination, sometimes manifested in the public performance of the creation of music is an essential part of the history of wylers as a genre and of its audience. The Small Axe Band, for example, began in 1980 as a roots reggae band called “Vibrational Roots.” By 1993, however, after a sonic shift to a more locally-influenced sound and a related name change, The Small Axe band that was, years prior, a staple of the small hotel entertainment scene, began to provide impromptu performances of their local sound on basketball courts and empty paved lots around the island. Other bands in the early 1990s that were experimenting with a new, faster, digital sound such as “14 Minus,” also participated in this culture of pop-up jam session dances. Jamcrew recalls that “in those days” crowds would gather to hear “dem guys experimenting and playing around” on their instruments, which included various programmable, drum machines, sound patches, keyboards, and electric basses and guitars. During the carnival season of 2012 I observed amongst young, wylers audiences a similar interest in and excitement surrounding being present for the pre-show, experimental or improvisatory part of wylers performances that includes sound checking instruments by “playing around” over a backbeat. Wylers bands that compete in the annual carnival road march competition typically arrive at the beginning of the official parade route after a long ride through town during which they play short, loud, relatively unpolished, and often improvised versions— adding different chants or taking liberties with repetition— of the songs they will later play on the parade route.

It is important to note that Jamcrew's *riddims* and the backbeat over which wylers bands "play around" in order to draw a crowd, became possible through an embrace of not only music that is physically created quickly (relative to locally, colonially informed standards of musicianship), but also through acquisition of instruments (music software) often through informal (and illegal) channels.<sup>203</sup> This type of fast track to creating music appears premature and untimely in relation to Valentine Morris' experience that included, "order[ing] instruments from overseas and practic[ing] for two years before playing anything anywhere."<sup>204</sup> Jamcrew's experience also stands in contrast to David Freeman's experience with instrumentalism, which included use of handcrafted wooden fifes and goatskin drums made locally in Nevisian villages in the 1940s and 50s. Contemporarily, many of the music programs in SKN that promote traditional modes of musical tutelage and *timely* musical participation are supported by donations from international organizations through the lengthy process of grant applications. Through engagement with electronic instruments and digital music-making, wylers practitioners deploy their untimeliness and are too fast in their circumvention of traditional channels of musicianship in this regard.

Electronic and digital instruments and music, mediums for one mode of decolonial, "too fast" and thus untimely participation, are also central to another decolonial characteristic of wylers: Its relationship to the local economy. At the 2004 symposium in Barbados about the future of international trade in the Caribbean as it relates to intellectual property, it was noted that, "Given the Caribbean Single Market

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<sup>203</sup> Peter Manuel's description of cassette culture provides insight into musical mobility and nationalism in the context of postcolonial India. Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.) Wayne Marshall has discussed Fruity Loops and other types music composition software as integral to changes in Caribbean popular music. See Raquel Rivera, Wayne Marshall, Deborah Pacini Hernandez, Eds. *Reggaeton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>204</sup> Morris, Interview, December 5, 2012

and Economy... the region will have to concentrate more on the acquisition and sale of intellectual property to sustain the member countries.”<sup>205</sup> This emphasis on intellectual property, especially as it relates to music, has informed many of the anticolonial education reforms that have supported the idea that, aside from tourism, culture --by way of the arts-- is a Caribbean export with great economic potential. Looking toward this type of change in 1991, Errol Miller wrote:

Most of the region’s most celebrated musicians, songwriters, artists, dancers, sportsmen, fashion models, businessmen, and impresarios have not been numbered its most successful students for the school system. Neither has their contribution to Caribbean economic growth been factored into the various equations for development. ...But neither the school system nor the planners of economic development can continue to ignore them, given the considerable potential that they constitute in a world which entertainment, sports, fashion, fine arts, and memorabilia... will be growth industries. Certainly, the Caribbean’s potential to export culture is greater than it’s prospect to export science and technology.<sup>206</sup>

Tourism, and the necessity for the curation of a national image that supports the ministry of tourism’s sellable version of SKN is the persuasive undercurrent of the promotion of the arts, especially music, with an eye toward “development.”

In a social climate where the efforts of the Ministries of Tourism in St. Kitts and Nevis go toward attracting foreigners to visit the federation, wylers and many of the attendant behaviors, do not adequately represent the nation as the haven of safe tranquility the official, national tourism campaign promises. Robert Kelly, the former director of the New York City office of the ministry of tourism noted, “In the early days [the 1980s] we had to tell people in the U.S.,

There is a tiny country in the Caribbean that has something new and exciting. We had to make presentations to travel agents— we still do— we would make a 2

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<sup>205</sup> Warren Cassell, “Investing in Intellectual Property: Profiting from Creativity.” In *Towards Sustainable Development in Montserrat: A Multi-Disciplinary Conference*, Woodlands, Montserrat, 2008.

<sup>206</sup> Errol Miller, *Education and Society in the Commonwealth Caribbean*. Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991.

hour presentation with pictures, and then we would bring out a masquerade dancer or a drum and fife band. Then the carnival queen pageant winner would come out, sometimes— on at least two occasions—and present her talent while wearing her crown. That big drum and fife was the infectious music that made these white people get up out of their seats and dance.”<sup>207</sup>

Within a nation that is economically and thusly socially dependent on tourism, music serves to help sharpen the nation’s image of itself, the dynamics of which are directly relative to the social parameters in which the nation becomes marketable. Traditional musics, such as the drum and fife music Kelly mentions, which is the specialty of a currently celebrated musician like David Freeman, are the sonic means by which St. Kitts and Nevis present themselves as “new” and “exciting” but, most importantly, worth visiting.

In an article about the importance of documenting older forms and practitioners of Kittitian-Nevisian Music, Nigel Williams, a Kittitian music historian, spoke to the relevance of specifically Kittitian-Nevisian music history to a broad swath of the Caribbean saying, “I don’t think the young people understand where soca really came from. As a matter of fact, it was born out of trying to put a set of music together, where you had a beat that made it easier for the Americans to understand. We used to play traditional calypso with a beat where we define it as boom-boom, boom-boom, now today soca is boup, boup, boup, boup, a straight beat.”<sup>208</sup> If, as Williams posits, 1980s

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<sup>207</sup> Robert Kelly, Interview, December 20, 2012

<sup>208</sup> “Cultural Music Documentary Debuts at Independence. <http://www.winnfm.com/press-releases/9754-cultural-music-documentary-debuts-at-independence#sthash.Q5r9BzWw.dpuf> Accessed 19 September 2014. This is not the commonly held understanding of the history of soca music as an offshoot of calypso. Most Caribbean music scholars acknowledge Ras Shorty I (1941-2000, formerly Lord Shorty), a Trinidadian calypsonian, as the originator of soca. He is credited with experimenting with mixtures of Afro-Caribbean Indo-Trinidadian rhythms to create what became a standard soca rhythm. However, it is possible that this genealogy of tempo (as opposed to rhythm) is more accurate for the small islands of the Eastern Caribbean where fast genres of carnival music such as wylers and some types of Dominican bouyon utilize as rhythm that deviates from traditional soca but is still recognized as a derivative of calypso. For more on this see Jocelyn Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad’s Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

calypso artists utilized a faster rhythm in order to appeal to an American dance-music oriented audience of outsiders, wylers musicians have become too fast, rendering their musicianship and music unauthorized because of its un-marketability. Where pre-independence colonial aesthetics and post-colonial nationalist culture-making impulses characterize two categories of authorized musicianship in SKN, wylers represents a departure from these via its position to tourism. Historically, local music trends followed closely the contour of the tourist-driven economy in the immediate independence moment, wylers, however, thrives and circulates in spite of the tourist economy. In this way, wylers is not only too fast rhythmically such that it engenders fast behavior, it is also perceived as too fast in its untimely participation in acts of musicianship that do not translate into the economic terms of the state.

Both Val Morris and Dagah mentioned that they believed wylers will never garner a high degree of “success” because those associated with it lack “professionalism.” The term professionalism, itself, is loaded with regards to its association with global middle-class values within Caribbeanist discourse. It has come to represent the modern manifestation of Peter Wilson’s characterization of respectability as an insidious part of the moral component of colonialism found in:

...the professional standards and moral expectations that Euro-American institutions, firms, hotels, and employers impose on their employees, beginning with standards of dress and address and going deeper by nurturing ambitions and setting the terms by which those ambitions might be realized, including a ‘respectable’ outlook on life and business. To the extent that companies do this, they invade the value system of the Caribbean, and the more powerful they are, the more successful the invasion.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Wilson, *Crab Antics*, 233.

Within SKN, Several aspects of wylers performance and business practice are cited as examples of wylers' failure to adhere to certain standards that tie professionalism to musicianship. One of my interlocutors lamented that "dem man ain' serious about the music. They too lazy" to do the research necessary to get "the music out there."<sup>210</sup> Where traveling overseas with their respective talents constituted a legitimization of Morris and Freeman's musicianship, that wylers is not wildly popular abroad, and that the bands typically only travel to cities such as New York and Miami where there are large concentrations of Kittitians and Nevisians, constitutes another reason for which their musicianship is seen as not "serious" in its unprofessionalism. For younger detractors who are fully "plugged in" to the newest technology available in SKN, that wylers music is largely unavailable on modern music purchasing platforms such as iTunes but *is* available via free download on remote file-sharing websites, where new albums are posted directly by the band, is just one example of the "unprofessionalism" surrounding wylers.

Wylers musicians rely heavily on digital samples and sound patches that are programmed into drum machines. Local Kittitian-Nevisian music has historically, especially post WWII, looked outside of the confines of the islands for musical inspiration. Lincoln Swanston, who was an active musician in tourist hotels in SKN and Tortola in the late 1960s and early 1970s, remarked that, "up until the 1970s there wasn't a lot of original music happening or really being recorded in St. Kitts and Nevis. People mostly recorded instrumental covers of popular calypsos from Trinidad. I guess since there was no singing, a lot of the covers we played faster than the original—to keep it

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<sup>210</sup>. Leonard "Jamcrew" Lestrade, Interview, December 8, 2014.



interesting.”<sup>211</sup> Over time, the manner of borrowing from various genres of global popular music and culture has expanded to include digital sampling in addition to melodic and rhythmic representations. The winner of the 2010 Road March in St. Kitts, for example, was a song entitled, “Rum Song” by The Small Axe Band. This tune sampled a large chunk of Lady Gaga’s 2009 chart-topping single “Bad Romance” for the chorus and borrowed from rapper T.I.’s “Whatever You Like” from the previous year for the song’s bridge.<sup>212</sup> Similarly, Road March contestants from 2011 and 2012 used popular public service announcements from around the Caribbean as the basis for the catchy chorus or “chant” portion of their songs.<sup>213</sup> Given the nature of copyright laws that would specifically prohibit the use of protected intellectual property, especially the heavily guarded musical contributions of American pop stars like Lady Gaga and T.I., wylers songs cannot be bought or sold in any official capacity.

Despite my numerous attempts to successfully schedule and complete an interview appointment with any members of and producers for Nu Vybes, Small Axe, Grand Masters, and The Kollision Band, I was met with subtle resistance at every turn. I tried to explain that I was interested in the development of music in St. Kitts-Nevis, and that I wanted to hear their thoughts about the tempo of contemporary Kittitian-Nevisian music. I made it clear that I was writing about “the history of tempo and rhythmic complexity” in St. Kitts-Nevis and I wanted to include “contemporary band music” in my

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<sup>211</sup> Lincoln Swanston, Personal correspondence, February 2 2015

<sup>212</sup> “Bad Romance” was number 2 on the Billboard pop chart for 2009. “Whatever You Like” was number 1 on the billboard hip hop chard for that same year.

<sup>213</sup> In 2012 The Kollision band used the jingle from a commercial for a popular Haitian energy drink called “Big Shake” and in the same year, The Small Axe Band sampled a popular public service announcement, “Drop, Cover, Hold on,” which was intended to inform Caribbean citizens about proper protocol in the case of an earthquake. “Drop, Cover, Hold on” became a popular dance during that carnival season. During the 2012-13 carnival season, in the wake the vote of No Confidence against the then-government leaders SKN, Dr. Denzil Douglas, the prime minister, urged his supporters during his weekly radio show “Ask the PM” to “drop, cover and hold on” to him as he weathered the political turmoil.

discussion. It is very likely that some of our missed connections could be blamed on a distinctly Caribbean sense of time and place that made “Meet me up by the hotel in the morning” count as an appointment, and allowed my insistence on further specification to appear excessive. Surely, my being a young woman did not lend much to the urgency or gravity of my research. However, it is possible that the apparent apathy toward my project and me could, without further comment from the artists themselves, be saying quite a bit about the role of wylers players within the history of Kittitian-Nevisian music.

Traditional postcolonial means of resistance against colonization’s erasure and denial of musical manifestations of black, and indigenous ways of thinking and being, can be characterized as participating in processes of legitimization. Val Morris’ description of the early reception of the steel pan in St. Kitts is instructive in this regard; the pan, despite its association with low-class, black youth, became acceptable in high-class circles once it was recognized as an instrument that could accommodate Western Classical music. In reading wylers band members and producers as decolonially acting outside of this trajectory it is possible that the missed appointments and underwhelming response I perceived as apathy was, instead, an active disinterest in the type of project that necessarily sought to translate wylers into the terms and within the parameters available to me at the time. Recall, then in Chapter Two where I describe how my interlocutors often made use of dances and rhythmic sounds as more useful and accessible stand-ins for the term “wylers,” and in response to questions about the appealing aspects of the genre. Initially, this type of non-verbal response appeared to signal an uncertainty about, and confusion or reluctance to discuss wylers. However, understanding wylers music, artists, and audiences as appealing to a decolonial aesthetic

allows for a reinterpretation that privileges wylers sounds, rhythms and bodily movements not as just stand-ins for “real words,” but as already meaningful.

A particular orientation to time legitimizes colonial musicianship: years of traditional tutelage; slow acquisition of instruments; and a long period of preparation before public performance. Similarly, a different but, I argue, equally colonially informed position on (chronological) time posits music as a static marker of national culture via appeal to “tradition” (and in the case of SKN, the “indigenous”). In promoting modes of untimely participation: fast, electronic and digital music; a collapsing of spaces for “playing around” and performance; and a circumvention of the economic market—tourism in particular--wylers practitioners have created space—sonic and physical—for valuing, sensing, and feeling, as Mention notes, from the “foundation” but of a “different time.”

## CHAPTER FOUR FAST MUSIC, FAST WOMEN: CITIZENSHIP AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIALITY

One of my mother's most vivid childhood recollections was of the Queen of England's visit in 1966. The Queen's voyage to the twin island state, though singular, was of course just the most recent instance of a historical pattern of British travel to St. Kitts-Nevis. In the one hundred years after Christopher Columbus' voyage to the new world, St. Kitts and Nevis remained relatively untouched by non-indigenous peoples. It was not until 1623 when Sir Thomas Warner, an experienced colonizer of South America, set up the first British colonial outpost in the Caribbean on the eastern portion of St. Kitts, that a steady pattern of European invasion in the area began.<sup>214</sup> The 1966 trip was Her Majesty's first visit to the island and the significance of her presence was almost tangible. The London Times article regarding the St. Kitts-Nevis leg of the West Indies tour described the festive scene:

There were nearer 5,000 today to welcome the Queen even for only an hour. They thronged the quay and the half dozen modest seafront buildings, all painted for the occasion. Even the workaday corrugated iron front of a warehouse was rejuvenated in pastel pink . . . At Government House there was an excited horde of schoolchildren, In the centre of the crowd below the balcony of the unpretentious little house an overawed boy and girl, about five years old, bore their eighteenth century dress and placards of "Mr. Hamilton" and "Mrs. Hamilton" with wide-eyed decorum.<sup>215</sup> Behind them a group of young men in black trousers and white shirts thumped away on their steel drums. The Queen, clearly enjoying the fun, smiled to a calypso of welcome composed by the warden of the island [.]<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Because of its status as the primary British Caribbean colony, St. Kitts is often referred to as the "Mother Colony"

<sup>215</sup> That would have been Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, General George Washington's chief of staff, who was born on Nevis in 1755.

<sup>216</sup> Our Special Correspondent, "Nevis Gets Its Long Awaited Look At The Queen." *Times* (London, February 23, 1966), 9.

On February 22, 1966, the day of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh's arrival, school children were lined up before the queen to demonstrate traditional Kittitian and Nevisian Big Drum music and dance, several little girls were instructed by their teachers and those in charge of coordinating the show to "sway gently from side to side." My mom, fifteen years old at the time, felt both confused and frustrated by this display of "nice dancing" accompanying the driving rhythms that for her, and for everyone else there, were markers of celebration. She recounts, "I said 'to hell with this' and started goin' on and wukin' up, shakin' my bum and ting." People around her pointed and laughed, amazed at her gumption. She was known for weeks afterward as "the girl who was wukin' up in front of the Queen." She recalls, "I was young and crazy. I didn't care. I think they wrote about me in the newspaper."<sup>217</sup>



**Figure 11 Onlookers and the Queen during her visit to St. Kitts, 1966. Courtesy of the St. Kitts-Nevis Archives.**

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<sup>217</sup> Yvette Swanston, Personal correspondence, July 4, 2011



**Figure 12 Girls lining the path in Charlestown, Nevis for the Queen's arrival, 1966. Courtesy of The St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**

While there is no evidence of a newspaper article having been written about the incident, this anecdote and the circumstances under which it was relayed to me are important and indicative of the distinctive threads of Kittitian and Nevisian society that, hewn together, create St. Kitts and Nevis' intricate historical backdrop. I learned this humorous but cautionary tale about "a time and place for everything" in the early 1990s and in the Bronx, NY. That two emigrants from St. Kitts and Nevis shared it is telling of the diasporic reaches of local Kittitian and Nevisian social notions; even in the spirit of postcoloniality, these notions get passed on to descendants for the sake of preserving 'culture' and 'tradition.' This tale exemplifies the perpetual and problematic presence of Europeans and later, Americans, whose unfettered ability to move about globally

positions them as entitled outsiders who visit St. Kitts and Nevis to consume, watch, and take. The branch of social scientific study referred to as mobility studies takes as its focus this type of power dynamic that is inherent to the notion of mobility and motility. As noted in the 2006 inaugural issue of the mobility studies journal *Mobilities*, the editors note that mobility studies seeks to foster “an appreciation of the complexity of mobility systems and the inter-relational dynamics between physical, informational, virtual and imaginative forms of mobility.”<sup>218</sup> As *Mobilities* co-editor Mimi Sheller has noted elsewhere, “the ties that bind the Caribbean to other places, are premised on everyday practices of consumption that occur through economies of movement, touch, and taste in overlapping fields of economic consumption, political consumption and cultural consumption.”<sup>219</sup> Local black children dancing for the Queen is one example of the ways in which moving, black bodies, particularly in the presence of still, white bodies, are always already sites of a problematic relationship to colonial respectability. The incongruence my mother felt between the fast, intricate big drum music and the “gentle” dancing is demonstrative of the ways that rhythm, and tempo are, too, socially coded and largely embodied. Her experience is an example of one of the many ways rhythm, tempo, and black, female bodies have been expected to represent the nation—both pre and post-independence.

Other mediums such as talent shows, beauty pageants, travel brochures, and daily entertainment cartoons present dancing black Kittitian and Nevisian girls and women as markers of the moral state of the nation. How these women dance, where, and to what often determines whether their explicitly gendered bodies are celebrated or

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<sup>218</sup> Mimi Sheller, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning* 38, no. 2 (2006): 207–26.

<sup>219</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to zombies* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2003), 4.

vilified via inclusion or exclusion from notions of national citizenship. Deborah Thomas and Mimi Sheller both discuss embodied citizenship as a powerful but redundant idea because citizenship, particularly in the Caribbean, is always wholly bodily. That is to say, bodies are only included within the folds of citizenship if they look a certain way, say certain things, and interact with other bodies in a particular manner.<sup>220</sup> This could be said for citizenship as a whole, though the particular colonial history of the Caribbean has created a galvanized history of intersectionally raced, gendered and sexed measures of citizenship. In this vein, recent feminist Caribbean scholarship has focused on bodies as a means of thinking critically about and theorizing the postcolonial Caribbean nation via citizenship (or exclusion from citizenship). I situate this chapter within that type of Caribbeanist scholarship. Mimi Sheller's work of this kind takes into account that political citizenship— inscribed onto passports and birth certificates—often does not afford very much to people of most Caribbean nations. This is especially true for extremely small microstates such as St. Kitts-Nevis. However, and perhaps in direct relation to political citizenship, "citizenship from below," the type that accounts for interpersonal interactions, is more reflective of ideas like representation, freedom, protection and belonging.<sup>221</sup> It is this type of citizenship, characterized by a discursive alignment with notions of "the nation," on which this chapter focuses. I still use the term "nation" to refer to the larger local community because this term holds weight for the people I seek to represent. However, to imagine that they are discussing the same type of

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<sup>220</sup> The recent flourishing of the economic citizenship program in SKN maybe been seen as counter to this idea. However, I suggest that the transnational mobility of the bodies in the position to invest in real estate in SKN, coupled with the fact that these bodies are mostly non-black, is another example of the always-embodied nature of citizenship.

<sup>221</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.



citizenship as when one refers to the American or French government would be inaccurate.<sup>222</sup>

My rationale for focusing on bodies in this chapter begins with my fieldwork and the explicit and repeated mention of black women's bodies as sites of contention. The emphasis on bodies, as opposed to "women" in general is evidenced by the descriptions of particular gyrating parts, or accusations of indecent exposure by women who, otherwise, are not known to be in bad moral standing. During my fieldwork, I noticed that particular bodies were condemned for their manner of dance in any particular moment, however, individual women were not generally ostracized when seen later in a more "appropriate" setting. The manner in which a woman's body moved and was made visible during dance was, even outside of that moment, often seen as an indicator of larger, "national" and perhaps international problems. In the same ways that my interviewees and interlocutors are keenly aware of the ways in which race, gender, and sexual orientation are the cornerstone to participation in various types of citizenship, this chapter aims to highlight the ongoing relationship between particular bodies, social processes, and the inter-bodily interactions that solidify and normalize these relationships.<sup>223</sup>

This chapter presents some of the pervasive, discursive criticisms of and reactions to female participation in music making in St. Kitts and Nevis. It is against this backdrop that females negotiate favorable positions, occupying numerous, often seemingly contradictory spaces and roles. Using current trends in decolonial analysis,

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<sup>222</sup> St. Kitts-Nevis' long history of poverty and extremely limited access has created a culture of migration. In this way, many people who claim St. Kitts and Nevis as "home" likely spend a majority of time away from those islands. Kittitian and Nevisian citizenship, then, holds more weight as a social indicator than as a political or legal status.

<sup>223</sup> Francisco Ferrándiz, "Open Veins Spirits of Violence and Grief in Venezuela." *Ethnography* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 39–61, 48 quoted in Deborah Thomas, *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 17.

this chapter then suggests that contemporary black, female, transnational citizens in St. Kitts-Nevis can be characterized by their various decisions to “us[e] techniques like juxtaposition, parody, or simple disobedience to the rules of art and polite society, to expose the contradictions of coloniality.” I read women's engagement with "too fast" behavior that “enact[s] critiques of colonial categories” as a mobilization of decoloniality.<sup>224</sup> As the following exploration illustrates, the specific history of Caribbean coloniality, however, particularly with regard to the institutionalization and social cooptation of specific types of "disobedience" into larger hierarchies of respectability, demands a more thorough understanding of the notion of resistance as decolonial. Here I am suggesting that it is not solely within disobedience that critiques of colonial categories emerge. Instead, I suggest that it is in traversing between these categories, elucidating their porosity, and by delinking from and strategically relinking to fraught notions such as nation, nonsense, hard work, linguistic excellence and public sexuality, that Kittitian-Nevisian women are contesting the legacy of modernity.

### **Respectability from Post-Emancipation to Post-Colonial**

Living between seemingly incompatible or incongruous cultural and social structures is not a new phenomenon in St. Kitts Nevis. Karen Fog Olwig has made evident in her discussion of post-emancipation Nevis, the existence of contradictory cultural traditions associated with essential aspects of life in Caribbean societies. The Nevisian traditions did not constitute bounded, autonomous, and independent cultural units but were, instead, associated with limited spheres of life, each of central

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<sup>224</sup> Mignolo, “Decolonial Aesthesis” [http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_topic/decolonial\\_aesthesis/](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_topic/decolonial_aesthesis/) accessed May 5, 2014

importance to the African-Caribbean population.<sup>225</sup> Olwig identifies three key "cultural traditions" in post-emancipation Afro-Nevisian society:

- 1) The implementation of a hierarchical plantation system,
- 2) The importance of African kinship relationships, and
- 3) The influence of Methodist missionaries in promoting an ideology of respectability.

Olwig notes that in the wake of emancipation, "as the plantocracy lost its power during the last part of the nineteenth century, the ideology of respectability and its associated social institutions gradually attained a dominant position in colonial society."<sup>226</sup>

While respectability was tightly bound to class structures and was, essentially, tied to the ability to afford particular types of material things and affect an air of creolized Britishness, respectability through an actual acquisition of wealth was nearly impossible for many newly freed blacks. The Methodist church and its connected respectable morals came to represent a secondary channel to respectability without the necessity of financial means. While denouncing material extravagance, the Methodist church promoted a sexual modesty that included monogamy and marriage, and excluded out-of-wedlock childbearing, which was often considered the result of cohabitation. However, as Olwig and Deborah Curtis have emphasized, Methodist respectability ideology was not always or even often implemented as practice. If a large portion of respectability ideology dictated a particular approach to sexuality, especially for women, a reliance on more African kinship relationships, and the economic necessity for alternate (non-patriarchal) approaches to land ownership often meant that unwed couples cohabitated and cared for their 'illegitimate children.' In this way, the

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<sup>225</sup> Karen Fog Olwig, "Cultural Complexity After Freedom," 116.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 106

implementation of Methodist ideologies signaled the growth of a culture of competing discourses surrounding female sexual behavior, as black female sexuality was solidified as the "organizing principa[l] for a new moral order prompted and institutionalized by the Methodist society."<sup>227</sup>

By 1828, the Anglican Church's attack against the Methodist church was in full force, as they both vied for moral and religious authority in St. Kitts-Nevis. At this time, Methodist marriages were criminalized and only marriages performed by the English or Irish church were recognized.<sup>228</sup> Still, however, throughout the post-emancipation era, respectable mores, especially those pertaining to appropriate female sexuality were still prevalent vehicles for social reproduction, as noted in the previous chapter. By the turn of the twentieth century, marriage had become financially unviable for most non-middle class black women, however connection to the church remained important to respectability status.

Currently, discourse surrounding women's sexuality is still historically tied to religious mores, and augmented by the acknowledgement of outside forces as competing with Christian ideology. Curtis notes,

For girls, staying off the streets at night, abstaining from sexual activity, heading home after school, earning high scores on exams, avoiding the effects of U.S. culture, specifically BET and soap operas, avoiding boys and older men, and attending church and church-sponsored youth group activities are conditions and activities that make a girl virtuous in the eyes of the religious community. When focusing on youth, community leaders often use the U.S as a gauge by which to measure Nevisian morality. Interestingly, the more Nevisian youth appear to mirror the customs and lifestyles of U.S youth, the greater the threat that Nevisian youth pose to Nevisian morality.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Debra Curtis, *Pleasures and Perils*, 54.

The aforementioned practicality and financial necessity of arrangements such as the renting of rooms to unmarried couples, which to Methodist missionaries was seen as promoting sexual immorality, suggests that while female sexuality appears to be linked to contemporary issues, there has always been a historical precedent for the association of Kitten-Nevisian female heterosexuality with consumerism. In other words, popular culture has historically been an arena where sexual respectability has been contested. Neoliberalism and an increased importation of American cultural products have augmented what has been a mostly religious conversation about proper female behavior into a more secular (though not wholly so), nationalist discussion. Within local discourse, *wylers* is as a local, pop-cultural form through which perceived displays of female sexuality are critiqued.

Olwig observes that Methodist missionaries "failed to convince their congregations of the desirability of adopting a life of British respectability that excluded the values and practices associated with the other cultural traditions on Nevis." She goes on to suggest that, "the only people who made a conscious effort to lead respectable lives expected by the missionaries were those who had 'a house to live in, a horse to ride and other property,' and who therefore could lay claim to middle-class status. For them, respectability became an important means to validate the privileged position in colonial society, which they had managed to acquire.<sup>230</sup> If for most emancipated Nevisians, actual acts of respectability were not practical or sustainable, however, I maintain that talk about respectability—particularly condemnation of the unrespectability of others—served as a manifestation of local, creole values within a colonial context, and that this practice of talk about respectability is still alive and well within Kittitian-Nevisian social

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<sup>230</sup> Karen Fog Olwig, "Cultural Complexity After Freedom," 113.

discourse.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, talk about black female sexuality within the context of popular music and dance is one of the many sites where, despite a change in the general social and political landscape of SKN society, the historical ties to religious morality can be rehearsed. The following section provides some examples of the discursive relationship between local music and female sexual respectability.

### **Women and The Rhetoric of Fastness**

On new year's eve 2012, or ol' year's day as it is called in SKN, I sat with Irving “Santoy” Barrett, a prominent music educator and musician on Nevis, above The Circus—an architectural ode to The Circus in Bath, England—that sits at the center of town in Basseterre. We were seated on the balcony of the Circus grill; a popular destination for tourists hoping for a good view and an approximation of local eats. The street adjacent to the circle is the physical barrier between the newly erected marina, Port Zante, and greater Basseterre. Stocked with morsels of “real” St. Kitts, the sidewalks were lined with vendors selling bags of pre-cut and peeled sugar cane and homemade hot sauces in plastic water bottles. A few dark, glistening and shirtless Rastas dutifully hacked off the ends of green coconuts, priming them for cruise ship passengers to politely sip as they waded through the steady stream of people going about their Christmastime business. Irving had taken the lunchtime ferry over to Basseterre from Charlestown, Nevis in order to play fife in the annual children’s masquerade happening later that day. Our elevated seats gave us a prime view of the passersby. Because St. Kitts and Nevis are small places there is an air of familiarity about almost everyone. It was not surprising, then, that Irving knew, heard of, or had thoughts about almost everyone we spotted below. Though not visible, a sound system boomed that year's wylers road march anthems throughout the busy streets. Perched from our spot, Irving and I people-

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<sup>231</sup> As first noted within Roger Abrahams’ work on gossip in the Caribbean.

watched over two Carib beers (he insisted I take mine in a glass), while we discussed the merits of Wylers.

**Irving:** *[Wylers is] going further and further back to Africa in its orientation. In its rhythmic make up. Even though you don't have a lot of melody to it, you have a lot of percussion, a lot of rhythm. And they use this thing called the rhythm box to program all these different rhythms with a touch of the finger. All of this is rhythm box; all the rhythm you're hearing here. None of this is live. So you can program 10 rhythms at the same time and [have] only two parts. You know, I mean when I look at it, I realize it's an approach—almost like a U-turn going back towards a more African oriented type of music.<sup>232</sup> But it has progressed into extreme sensualism—approaching vulgarity. [Wylers music] isn't stupid, it's just not sophisticated. Sophisticated to me, as it relates to music. There is something called music intelligence and there's something called music common sense. It is extremely limited. Let me not use the word intelligence. It's very limited. We've been here for 45 minutes and all I've heard is two chords. I need more than that to interest me. And what are they singing? They singing stupidity! Because it doesn't pertain to anything concerning survival, concerning our way of life. A lot of it is sensual decadence. A lot of it is strictly sensuality. It's foolishness. I don't know how to describe it. Reggae makes sense to us as a people. My vocabulary perhaps won't permit me to find the right word. I don't want to say unsophisticated. There's a saying, 'he singing but he naw a say nuttin' these guys aren't saying anything. They're not saying anything everyone can relate to. Not everyone can relate to, 'wine back on the iron, shub back on de iron, love up the iron, wuk on de iron.'<sup>233</sup> I was there in the late 60s and 70s and it was different. People have taken the expression of what they feel to a different level. In that whereas you would see a woman push back*

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<sup>232</sup> Irving's "U-turn" comments resemble Carolyn Cooper's (Carolyn Cooper *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) about the minimalist, digitized beats of early dancehall of the 1980s.

<sup>233</sup> *Iron* here refers to male genitalia. It is also used to refer to driving percussion. Dancing or moving "on the iron" or "to the iron" is a commonly used double-entendre in Caribbean carnival music.

*in a kind of way, a blatant sexual way you didn't find that in the 60s, and 70, and 80s. People would dance in the band, for example, jam in the band, and man would got he hand around a woman and she would have her butt back on him. Now you find a lot of women have taken that— and men, too— have taken that to an advanced stage. If you have to see it. I don't know if I can put it in words. But I certainly wouldn't want to be in the band and have no woman wukkin' on me like that. So it's blatantly sexual. Sexual is different to moderately sexual which is different to blatantly sexual. Or blatantly carnal. That's a good way to look at it. But it has changed. It has changed. I have seen people go down in the street and they're there with their crotch [pushed] right back. Last Culturama I was there with a couple other music educators and we were saying, "Oh my God, that's not what I'm here to see;" our young children up there imitating—I don't know who they're imitating. I guess they see it on the TV. Of course they're exposed to more things than we were exposed to. With the advent of the internet, they see things that we wouldn't have dreamed of seeing on any media outlet and they were dancing and they had on these little short pieces of ting and their crotches were right to the audience and the man who was being honored as the grand master of the carnival—the old man—he just put his hand up over his mouth like this. He's my father's age. He's probably 80. I didn't like that. I have a daughter growing up here and I wouldn't want my daughter up on stage going on like that. There are other ways to dance. There are lots of other ways to express yourself. One of my keyboard players who I trained, I was in a rehearsal, and we stopped for a little bit. We had a little break and he started talking to one of the drummers saying, 'Bahy! You see what happen in de crowd last night? I cyan believe it.' I say what happened? 'This young man and this young woman did it right there in front the stage. She pull down and—' I mean music has such an effect on people! 'She pull down and he pull out and he put it in right there' I said, 'Oh my God! That's another stage!' If I was there I would have advised the police to arrest them right there! I'm just saying, that is just a more advance stage. You didn't find a lot of that before. The best way to describe it is to say, there's a saying in the Caribbean 'where tings does start is not where it does end.' It started one way, and now it's a completely different thing. It started as sensualism and turned into extreme*



*sexualism bordering on vulgarity... I guess the music has a lot to do with it. Music has such power.*

Irving's remarks tie much of the problems of *wylers* to the issue of sexuality. In his descriptions we see instances of young girls seeking to honor an older, male generation of carnival musicians with lewd displays of their gyrating crotches. In one extreme case, "carnal" dancing quickly devolved into an episode of public sexual intercourse. There appears to be the assumption that if the music were more harmonically diverse, and if the lyrics were more "sensible," women's bodies (and by extension, men's bodies) would behave differently.<sup>234</sup> Irving's intentional substitution of the word "talk" for "sing" in the saying, "he a sing but he naw a say nuttin'," is just one allusion to the perceived importance of lyrics, words, and of "making sense" to Nevisian and Kittitian audiences. The inadvertent association of African aesthetics with extreme sexuality—where "extreme" denotes a negative association with sexuality—is, as we have seen, an example of the legacy of coloniality. The related and problematic aspects of *wylers*—its compositional limits, emphasis on sex, and lyrical irrelevance—mirror, in many ways, the linkages that solidify the colonial matrix of power. When Irving says "the music has an effect on people," there is the presumption that the people—largely women—do act differently outside of the audible range and performance space of *wylers*.

Considering the "power" of music, Irving emphasizes the dense polyrhythms, or the stacking of separate rhythms programmed in the "rhythm box," the lack of melodic and harmonic intricacy, and the carnality of the accompanying dances as striking and displeasing features of the music. His remarks are reminiscent of early travel

ethnographies that elucidate European travelers' early encounters with African and Afro-Caribbean music and dance.<sup>235</sup> As an example, in 1766 Daniel Fenning and Joseph Collyer describe the music of the Khoekhoe, a Southern African ethnic group (derogatorily referred to as the Hottentots) as follows:

Though it has but few charms for a European ear, and is but poorly provided with both instruments and tunes, it shows a genius and sensibility in the Hottentots, which entirely destroys the credit of those accounts which represent them as monsters of stupidity.<sup>236</sup>

Noted abolitionist George Pinckard, M.D. wrote of the slaves on Barbados in 1816,

They assemble in crowds, upon the open green, or in any square or corner of the town, and, forming a ring in the center of the throng, dance to the sound of their beloved music, and the singing of their favorite African yell. Both music and dance are of savage nature. Their songs are very simple, but harsh and devoid of melody.<sup>237</sup>

This, of course, is not to suggest that Irving's reactions to or comments about the music are due to cultural ignorance. Instead, I suggest that a particular orientation to music and aesthetics in general has both been the impetus behind much of *wylers* and has informed much of its criticism. That the comments have not changed very much since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is indicative of the social reproduction of colonial ideas, particularly colonial aesthetics, in St. Kitts-Nevis. That the behavior of women's bodies is seen as compelling evidence for a critique against the intellectual, musical, and social merit of *wylers* is a prime example of the ongoing relationship between black Kittitian-Nevisian

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<sup>235</sup> I use both "African" and Afro-Caribbean" to refer to the sounds discussed in late 18<sup>th</sup> Caribbean travel ethnographies. These travelers would have observed the music practices of African slaves in the Caribbean. It is inaccurate to refer to this music exclusively as "African" in that the colonial practice of separating slaves from similar geo-cultural areas would have predicated a mixing of traditions to create amalgam practices.

<sup>236</sup> Daniel Fenning, and Joseph Collyer, *A New System of Geography*. Vol. 2. (London: Crowder, 1765), 377

<sup>237</sup> George Pinkard, *Notes on the West Indies* (London, 1816), 126-7.

women's bodies, and other social processes. In short, black women's bodies come to ambivalently represent both the triumphs and the ills of the nation where the latter is often conceptually connected, in some way, to popular music.

### **Women and Oppositional Politics**

Evidenced by the following examples, and as noted by M. Jacqui Alexander, standing as a challenge to colonial ideology of the nuclear heterosexual and patriarchal family, female sexuality and erotic autonomy have historically been problematic for the state. This is particularly true because adherence to colonial notions of citizenship, “perpetuate[s] the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society” while erotic autonomy “signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation.”<sup>238</sup> In this way, Alexander continues, citizenship is “perennially colonized with reproduction and heterosexuality” such that “erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship, or no responsibility at all.”<sup>239</sup> Female sexual autonomy, then “signals danger to respectability—not only respectable middle-class families, but most significantly to black middle-class womanhood.” In Alexander’s discussion of female erotic autonomy in the Bahamas, she notes that lesbians and prostitutes are seen as “major symbols of threat” via their “embodiment of the dangerous eroticism.”<sup>240</sup> Homosexuality and prostitution do, also, figure as symbols of erotic threat in SKN.<sup>241</sup> However, within much popular discourse, it is the dancing woman—embodying her supposed neglect of motherly duties, lack of sexual chastity, and standing in apparent contradiction to colonial middle-class mores—

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<sup>238</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Male to male homosexual acts are prohibited in SKN under law. Lesbianism has not been governmentally prohibited, but is also regarded as taboo.

who symbolizes a threat to Kittitian and Nevisian citizenship.

In her reaction to M. Jacqui Alexander's most prominent works, Tracy Robinson has suggested that her thinking about feminism and Caribbean women's resistance differs slightly from Alexander's.<sup>242</sup> Alexander says that the "space of the erotic," the "space of the soul," and the "space of the Divine"—the links integral to feminist decoloniality— cannot be maintained solely through oppositional politics. Robinson augments this idea with regard to the potency and longevity of oppositional politics to suggest that the desires and imagined lives of Caribbean women "can be fundamentally different from the inverse of what [they] think is undesirable."<sup>243</sup> Robinson's idea challenges the equation of resistance to a politics of opposition by broadening the scope of options for active feminist autonomy within the Caribbean. I suggest that Kittitian and Nevisian women's bodies, particularly when accompanied by music, are creating a space for what Alexander may call 'erotic autonomy' that resists the sole appeal to oppositional politics.

Working within the frame of respectability and reputation, scholars of Caribbean women's issues such as Carla Freeman and Belinda Edmondson have broached the topic of a broadened notion of resistance and unconventional avenues toward respectability. These scholars have noted, as has been amply written about within Caribbean studies, that the outward performance of female sexual prowess works in direct contradiction to typical ideals of respectability. While globalized movement and change have long been parts of both the Caribbean economic context, the "flexibility" and change brought about by neoliberal economic policies has begged for research that "shed[s] light on some of the ways in which respectability is sought, contested, and is actively re-constituted in the

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<sup>242</sup> Tracy L. Robinson, "A Loving Freedom: A Caribbean Feminist Ethic." *Small Axe* 24 (Oct 2007): 118-129, 124.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

contemporary context.”<sup>244</sup> In this way, Carla Freeman sees respectability as no longer functioning solely as a form of gendered oppression and sexualized nation building. Instead, in line with ideological notions of the neoliberal agenda’s emphasis on individualism, Freeman suggests that various actors employ respectability differently as a tool. Naturally, some are in positions to utilize it to more beneficial ends than others. With this in mind, Freeman has focused on professionalism as taking the place of respectability insofar as professionalism is considered a way of circumventing the traditional respectable role of the keeper of private aspects of daily life (including to stay at home with children, to cook, clean, and attain patriarchal, familial association with the male head of household who financially maintains the family by working outside of the home) through the accumulation of wealth and status via traditionally male roles.<sup>245</sup>

In her work on middle-class/middlebrow culture on islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad, Belinda Edmondson also suggests that in these larger Caribbean nations, traditional respectability has been replaced by American-style professionalism. This type of professionalism according to Edmondson is “informed by a familiarity with American manifestations of middle-class culture” such as the act of reading romance novels and participating in beauty pageants where the beauty pageant “covers roughly the same terrain as the romance novel—social aspiration, nationalism, and pleasure.”<sup>246</sup>

Respectability through professionalism in some Caribbean contexts refers to the power to consume American goods and affect a sense of African American middle-class

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<sup>244</sup> Carla Freeman. “Neo-Liberalism, Respectability, and the Romance of Flexibility in Barbados.” *Working Paper No. 40*, 1-29, Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life (April 2005), 13

<sup>245</sup> There is also an international aspect of professionalism where Caribbean women affect a particular type of African American female aesthetic in their embrace of traditionally male (reputational) roles. This is a point Edmondson makes with regards to a long history of African American influence on Caribbean middle-class tastes starting at least in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her argument runs counter to suggestions that in islands under British colonial rule, Britain stood as the only outside cultural influence.

<sup>246</sup> Belinda Edmondson, “Making the Case for Middlebrow Culture,” *Transnational American Studies*, Vol 2. No. 1, 2010, 13.

femininity. In the contemporary moment, colonial respectability can be seen as the specter of ongoing anxieties about modernization, economic growth, nationalism, and cultural authenticity that manifest themselves in self-realized gender roles.<sup>247</sup> It is this self-realization that catalyzes nationalist discourse surrounding the “cultural dance” portion of an annual beauty pageant, while individual performances of local, secular dance are the subject of discussions of fastness and too fastness.

### **The Toon Center and the Rhetoric of Delinquent Women**

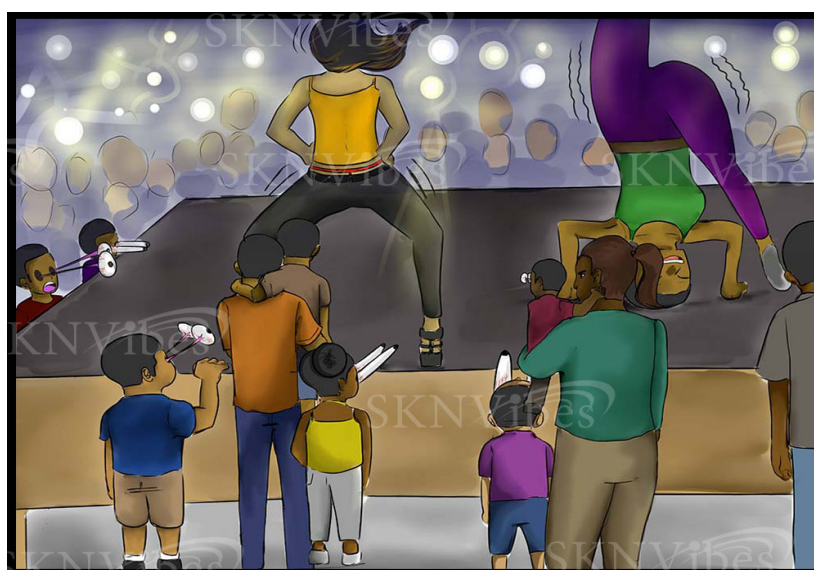
The "Toon Center" is a popular aspect of SKNVibes.com, the most prominent news and entertainment website in St. Kitts-Nevis. Every day, a cartoon depiction of local cultural criticism is posted and site visitors use the "comments" section as a forum to voice opinions. Not surprisingly, many of the topics concern the behavior of women. More specifically, these cartoons often offer critiques to women's association with local music. Not surprisingly, many of the public discussions surrounding the moral state of the nation vis-à-vis women's bodies abound in the immediate post-carnival/Christmas season. This cartoon, posted on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014, the day after the end of the annual carnival season, depicts two women dancing on stage in an extravagant style most popularized by Jamaican dancehall queens. One woman is crouching and facing away from the crowd that is made up entirely of parents and young children whose eyes are literally bulging out of their heads in horror and surprise. Though the head of the older, conservatively dressed mother standing at the front of the stage is covering the majority of the other dancing woman's face, we see that the second dancer is grinning and standing on her head with one leg in the air, exposing her crotch. Both women have been

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<sup>247</sup> Vrushali Patil, *Negotiating Decolonization in the United Nations: Politics of Space, Identity, and International Community* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

drawn with motion lines around them to suggest that their bodies are shaking. (See Figure 13).

This depiction, in contrasting the fore-grounded families, specifically, adult men and women holding young children close to them, with dancing women publically shaking their private parts, literally questions the community's moral compass. The title of the cartoon is as much a question as it is a statement; the cartoonist—who is anonymous— asks the audience, "Is this what we encourage?"



**Figure 13 “Is This What We Encourage?”<sup>248</sup>**

Many people responded with comments that exemplify varied sides of the possible argument. On one hand, there is the argument, exemplified in the comments below, that this type of dancing is inherently and explicitly sexual to the point of vulgarity and is a problem that plagues not just SKN, but the entire black race. One comment suggests that allowing children to view this type of dancing is a major factor in the prevalence of teen or child pregnancy. While the comment does not smack of

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<sup>248</sup> Reproduced here with permission from SKNVibes.com

religious criticism, its author does juxtapose this type of dancing and its relationship to underage or child pregnancy with acting "holy." Similarly minded comments compare the dancers to strippers and their movements to "dry sex"—a behavior below that which is seen in (circus) animals:

- 1. I am so glad that the cartoonist did this. From watching and reading the cartoon I realize the emphasis is on the CHILDREN carried those kind of places by ADULTS to watch those kind of VULGARITY or ADULTS behavior. Now, I saw an incident on Dec.26th,2013 @ Party Central, where these women was wuking up on stage and the DJ called a 9 year old girl to participate in it. I started shouting out to him, "tek she outta ah it, that's not her place to be". That was very distasteful. lord forbid, in the next year or 2, she belly big, everybody wants to know what happen. If we as adults exposed children to these things, what do we EXPECT, that they act all holy, NO!! Adults, those behavior by children are not CUTE or a LAUGING thing. STOP IT!! let them take their time to grow and enjoy childhood. I HATE it with a PASSION.*
- 2. NOTHING BUT STRIPPERS GONE WILD! NOT A LAUGHING MATTER, BUT A BIG DISGRACE TO OUR RACE!*
- 3. Its not only in Basseterre. Its wherever we gather & they are trying to pass this dry s@x off as dancing and it is NOT! It is a disgrace to see our young girls and old women too lowering themselves to this kind of behavior. Its very circus like and I don't see animals behaving this way!<sup>249</sup>*

On the other hand, as one comment demonstrates, the other side of this discussion recognizes the possibility for other interpretations of this type of dance. Without

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<sup>249</sup> "Is This What We Encourage?" Toon Center, January 3, 2014, <http://www.sknvibes.com/toons/details.cfm?Idz=98> accessed January 22, 2014. Comments left in their original form.



specifying exactly who the "we" represents in the historical approximation of this type of public dance, one commenter asks,

*Would you prefer we waltz or do the 2-step? The problem is not in and of itself the dancing but our societal values that are warped to place sexual currency to our actions. In some cultures nudity is a way of life yet remember in some countries women would be stoned for indecency simply for showing their eyes. We exported this dance to the world and then reimported it as vulgarity.<sup>250</sup>*

In posting local values and criticisms as "warped," the commenter suggests there was an original, or unaltered set of values that would have regarded the display in the cartoon, or at least the display that occurred on December 26, 2013, as culturally relative. In contrasting this type of dancing that has been referred to as "vulgar" with a codified European dance such as the waltz, and with what I suggest is an equally codified and generally non-Caribbean folk and popular dance (the two-step), the commenter subtly references a hierarchical valuation of European or, at least, non-Caribbean movement and music over that which is emanating from SKN. Of particular interest to me is how and why this type of discussion takes place because of, on, and in black women's bodies.

Another similar cartoon furthers this critique of female bodies and their expected roles. This cartoon, entitled "Parenting Standards Out the Window," depicts two relatively scantily dressed women in the latter weeks of their pregnancies interacting in a nightclub setting. One woman proclaims her love for the band, very presumably a *wylers* band, and the other agrees, commenting that she wanted to get in her "last jam" or dance session before the arrival of her baby. In the background, another young woman stands next to a stroller, and her arm motions suggest that she is removing her bra, likely to prepare to breastfeed her child. Many of the comments about the cartoon agree that this

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

type of behavior is a widespread problem and is indicative of skewed priorities, and is proof of the questionable parenting that is often blamed for many of the social ills (particularly violence, theft, and teen pregnancy) that are perceived as plaguing the nation (See Figure 14).



**Figure 14. “Parenting Standards Out the Window”<sup>251</sup>**

1. *This picture is so true. The young people them feel like them going die if they miss a session. And when they children are born they want them to be different when they don't set an example.*
2. *Oh plz, a large number of Kittitian women have no moral code, no respect, no principles, nothing and that goes for pregnant and non pregnant.*
3. *skn woman and dey low standards all bout de place wid big belly in de dance*
4. *and when jam sweet them a worry and say mine you push me dung when they should be home.. and if them get shub want cause big scene<sup>252</sup>*

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<sup>251</sup> Reproduced here with permission from SKNVibes.com

The comments suggest that this cartoon resonates with some members of the society who feel similarly to the commenters from the first cartoon post. The idea of these women's pregnant bodies even occupying the space of the dance is indicative, as one person wrote, of a lack of morals, respect, and principals. The first comment suggests that even people who participate in jam sessions or attend dances have some degree of ambivalence toward their own participation. In noting that young citizens behave as though the dance is very important to them but, at the same time, wish for a different set of priorities for their own children, this commenter elucidates the ingrained notions of shame, and female appropriateness that underlie many interpersonal interactions, despite the nature of the actions, themselves. These ingrained notions inform most of the other comments, which, I am suggesting, are very representative of the informal discourse surrounding women, music, and dance in SKN. Music—the sounds, the spaces, and the dances—constitutes one site of struggle over the regulation of sexuality.<sup>253</sup> The regulation of sexuality, then, is an important aspect of the defining of Kittitian-Nevisian citizenship.

That both of these cartoons and the discussions they engendered surround the issue of black Kittitian and Nevisian women's bodies, and their responsibilities to children, family, and representation of not only the nation, but of "the race" is not without historical precedent. Along with notions of sexual purity and the promotion of marriage, post-Emancipation women were encouraged to stay at home and tend to

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<sup>252</sup> "Parenting Standards Out the Window" SKNVibes.Com, Toon Center, December 11, 2013 <http://www.sknvibes.com/toons/details.cfm?Idz=86>, accessed January 22, 2014. Comments left in their original form.

<sup>253</sup> This is the case in all of the Caribbean—particularly in Afro-Caribbean societies. See Carolyn Cooper and Andrea Shaw, 2005; Shalini Puri, 1997, 2004; Belinda Edmondson, 2003.

children while family patriarchs worked for wages outside of the home. While this was not usually a practical arrangement, the ideology remained the same even throughout the independence moment. While it became more acceptable for women to work outside the home, the ideology of the two-parent, heterosexual household as necessary for the upbringing of responsible citizens prevailed.<sup>254</sup>

### **The History of Christmastime ‘Cultural’ Traditions**

Since 1974 Nevis has held its own mid-summer celebration, separate from the national carnival held on St. Kitts during the Christmas season, called “Culturama.”

Initially, the aim of the festival was to do the following:

1. To give a vital thrust to our dying traditional customs.
2. To stimulate an interest in the wealth of our cultural heritage (local folk art).
3. To receive and create a climate in which indigenous folklore can reassert itself and flourish. And of course a secondary purpose was to raise funds to build a Community Center to serve as a necessary base for the projection of Cultural Awareness Programmes.<sup>255</sup>

Generally, the festival has held to its original intentions and, although it happened many years later, in April of 2012 a performing arts center was indeed opened in the Pinney’s section of Nevis. Culturama has historically stood in direct contrast to the commercialized, modern iteration of carnival that Christmas Carnival in Basseterre has become in the recent past. The distinction between the two carnivals—one reserved and historically-informed and the other, a more raucous and flashy presentation—matches

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<sup>254</sup> Actual family organization in St. Kitts and Nevis is more complicated than this. It is not unusual for a mother and child to live separately from the father who is, at least in part, still financially responsible for the entire family. Often, one parent lives and works off the island and sends remittances for the care of the family. It is also common for both parents to live abroad and for children to reside with grandparents (usually the grandmother). While these types of family arrangements are widespread and accepted, fatherlessness and poor parenting is usually blamed when youth exhibit questionable or unacceptable behavior. Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants*, 50.

<sup>255</sup> “About Culturama” [http://www.nevisculturama.net/about\\_culturama.htm](http://www.nevisculturama.net/about_culturama.htm) Accessed April 19, 2014

the ways that the two separate islands are regarded by Kittitians and Nevisians. The differences between Nevis and St. Kitts and of their inhabitants have been observed since the early colonial period. Bonham Richardson notes that the geologic differences between the two islands—with St. Kitts having more arable land—created a situation where much of the land in St. Kitts was used for sugar cane fields starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>256</sup> In Nevis, since large areas could not be planted, slaves, and later, free blacks tended to small plots of land for subsistence farming.<sup>257</sup> In the post-emancipation era, plantation land remained the property of wealthy planter families on St. Kitts while in Nevis black land ownership became a possibility. In the 1970s, “On Nevis, land ownership [was] a mark of prestige on St. Kitts, little land is available for purchase by would-be smallholders.”<sup>258</sup> In the post-emancipation era free blacks on Nevis were regarded as spendthrift, simple country folk whereas Kittitians were seen as a relatively more cosmopolitan group. While travel between the two islands is relatively inexpensive and the trip takes less than an hour, there is an underlying tension between inhabitants of the two islands that belies their status as a federated nation. Culturama, as a celebration of specifically Nevisian folk art, has been a point of contention especially for older male Nevisians who have a vested interest in maintaining a separate and historically informed folk art scene in Nevis.

In the Friday, August 10, 2012 edition of the St. Kitts-Nevis observer, one Nevisian correspondent wrote,

The appalling showdown of revelers in action on Jouvvert morning 2011 and again this year has left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Nevisians and I might add, some Kittitians as well. Despite declining morals of some Nevisian females, they seldom ever engage publicly in the gross vulgarity displayed by their counterparts

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<sup>256</sup> Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants*, 38.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 41

from across the narrows. The despicable act of wukkin'-up and carrying on in gross misconduct is something we can well do without here on Nevis. The display and music observed on Tuesday should not be tolerated."<sup>259</sup>

The writer's sentiments are not very different from those expressed elsewhere. That Nevisian girls (and their morality) are compared to outside entities is a common thread amongst most of the similar commentary. It is notable that the "outside" here refers to St. Kitts—the other island in a two-island nation. The tension between the two islands expressed here highlights the tenuous nature of the nation and its nationalism and emphasizes the importance of inter-bodily relationships or citizenship from below as a more on-the-ground instantiation of belonging, inclusion and, most obviously in this case, exclusion. These comments directly associate the "display" (dancing characterized by its "gross vulgarity") with the music—specifically *wylers* bands from St. Kitts. Elsewhere in the article, the author suggests that the transgressions of Nevisian women and the presentation of *wylers* music stood in direct contradiction to that year's Culturama slogan, "Our Identity is Our Survival."<sup>260</sup> Here, again, women and their moving bodies, largely through indictment, are put forth as representations and gauges of the moral success of the larger community. Essentially, as these examples have shown, there is a perceived correlation between fast (stupid, intolerable) music and performances of fastness (grossness, vulgarity, immorality) by Kittitian and Nevisian women. Returning to M. Jacqui Alexander's assessment of the colonial matrix (including but not limited to the state, heterosexuality, reproduction, and religion), The annual National Carnival Queen competition in St. Kitts serves as one example of the manifestation of this matrix while also highlighting some ways that women draw attention to and challenge the ideologies upholding that structure.

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<sup>259</sup> Clinton Swanston, "Nevis and St. Kitts Culturama,"

<http://www.thestkittsnevisobserver.com/2012/08/10/swanston.html>, Accessed April 12, 2014

<sup>260</sup> "About Culturama" [http://www.nevisculturama.net/about\\_culturama.htm](http://www.nevisculturama.net/about_culturama.htm) accessed April 12, 2014

The first Carnival Queen show was held on December 31, 1957 in Basseterre's Warner Park—the same park that would house the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's visit in 1966 and had been the space of celebration for Princess Margaret's visit two years prior in 1955. The 1957 show showcased the daughters of St. Kitts' wealthiest white and mixed-race residents and much of the commentary describing the evening's events likened the contestants' "charm and grace" to that displayed by Princess Margaret during her recent visit. The winner, Judy Mestier, was described in the *St. Kitts-Nevis Tribune* as being as fine as "Dresden China" with beautiful qualities like "moonlight nocturne."<sup>261</sup> As Mandisa and Warner note, "The carnival was a splendid display which some likened to the year of 1911 when the coronation of King George V was celebrated on the island."<sup>262</sup> The late 1950s saw the peak of nationalist and pro-independence sentiments that had grown exponentially in the preceding decade. St. Kitts' most expansive labor movement—the impetus for its first proletariat political party—had begun in earnest in the late 1930s and, by the late 1940s, was headed by Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw<sup>263</sup> 1951 saw what Vincent Hubbard has described as, "the greatest shift of power in St. Kitts since Europeans had displaced Indians in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century;" all Leeward island citizens received popular suffrage and "were able to vote and control their own destiny."<sup>264</sup> Bradshaw, who by 1952 was leader of both the Trade and Labour Union and the governing political party in St. Kitts (The Worker's League), was also a vocal supporter of the pending West Indies Federation. Ultimately, the Federated West Indies project failed, though during its short-lived tenure Bradshaw served as Minister of Finance from

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<sup>261</sup> Mandisa and Warner, *The History of St. Kitts-Nevis Carnival*, Xlibris, 2010, Kindle edition

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts, 139*. The Labour Union in St. Kitts began in 1939 when the formation of unions became legal within the Leeward Islands. Initially, Edgar Challenger headed the St. Kitts Trades and Labour Union, a long-fought consequence of the Caribbean-wide labor strikes in 1896 and 1935.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 140

1958 to 1962 (when the Federation dissolved).



**Figure 15 Judy Mestier (left), St. Kitts 1957, First winner of Carnival Queen title. Courtesy of St. Kitts-Nevis Archives**

At its inception, primarily the democratic political party made up of Kittitian planter and merchant families supported the Carnival Queen pageant. In this way, parts of official carnival in St. Kitts (meant to represent St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla) was political and disproportionately representative of a group of Kittitians and Nevisians tied historically to the colonial regime and to the financial benefits of its legacy. The newspaper descriptions of the contestants that compare each woman to British royalty,



German porcelain, and French Classical music are indicative of the tone of that portion of the season's festivities.<sup>265</sup> The political association between the annual Queen show as a new aspect of Christmastime festivities continued throughout the 1960s, and in many ways mirrored the political climate of the then-associated state of St. Kitts- Nevis- Anguilla.

The Carnival Queen pageants, however (in their various permutations and under changing leadership) remained a marker of the islands' decency and prestige as these young women were called on to showcase their beauty, ability to speak *properly*, and their artistic talents as representative of a civilized, independent but colonial-minded "nation" in its changing conditions of statehood. The Carnival Queen Pageant as it exists today is similar in its relationship to politics and a show of national upward mobility through 'cultured' displays of song and dance. The swimsuit and eveningwear categories remind us that just as the Caribbean has always relied on women's bodies for its representation, the successful Carnival Queen contestant too must balance her religiously-based morality and her Methodist emphasis on education (and talking sweet) with a nationalist emphasis on authenticity—which is anchored by nationalism's precarious relationship to both the exploitation and fervent protection of female sexuality.

### **National Carnival Queen Competition 2012-13**

My experience at the 2012-2013 Carnival Queen Competition held in Warner Park, Basseterre, St. Kitts sheds some light on the ways that the Carnival Queen pageant remains tethered to the state and is reproductive of many of the aspects of the colonial

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<sup>265</sup> It appears that other parts of Carnival such as the masquerade troupes, calypso shows, and string bands, were more strongly associated with notions of tradition as it relates to the Christmas Sports indigenous to St. Kitts-Nevis.

matrix that M. Jacqui Alexander describes. On the other hand, a discussion of the talent portion of the evening's events elucidates a salient example of the manner in which Kittitian and Nevisian women are contesting the legacy of modernity by moving between worlds of meaning.

As I have noted elsewhere, Basseterre's Warner Park is a multifunctional space. It has been an arena for royal pomp and circumstance following the visit of British royalty; it has been a field for decades of cricket matches; and annually, it turns into "Carnival Village," the official space where events such as the Calypso King and Queen competition, the SoCal Monarch competition, the Miss Talented Teen competition, and, the focus of my interest here, the Carnival Queen competition. As is customary for this event, one band provides all of the live music for the pageant and offers a 20-30 minute performance before the "evening wear" segment, which is typically followed by pronouncement of the winner. "Green House," who was billed "The number 1 Rock and Reggae band from St. Kitts Nevis", provided that year's musical accompaniment.<sup>266</sup> The band was exceptionally polished and played a number of American R&B and Top-40 pop hits in intermissions between each segment of the pageant. Their set list included a rendition of Psy's "Gangnam Style" (complete with carefully approximated Korean lyrics), and a 20-minute loop of the chorus of Rihanna's hit "Shine Bright Like A Diamond" to accompany the contestants' eveningwear parade. Green House's accompaniment added a black, American, upscale feel to the event. Like many of the Caribbean events broadcasted on American TV—especially on BET—a foreign-looking, light-skinned, beautiful young female from Barbados hosted the event. Her presence seemed to be an affront to many of the audience members who wondered why a Baja

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<sup>266</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Green-House/135109073170179> accessed January 3, 2014

would host their national Queen pageant.<sup>267</sup> Throughout the evening, she—and her Bajan roots—were the butt of many of the crowd’s jokes. For example when she paused briefly and stumbled over her words, a man in front of me yelled toward the stage, “you suppose’ to come from Barbados and you cyan read?” At one point in the evening, the host playfully remarked that she heard “St. Kitts and Nevis people can wine almost as good as Bajans.” It was clear that the host was unsure of the correct nomenclature for persons from St. Kitts and Nevis, and in response, one woman in the crowd stood up and shouted, “They let you come here when you ain’ even know we are *KEE-ttitians and NEE-visians?*” She added with a fake, high-pitched British affect, “And we don’t *wine!*” Leaning back slowly into her chair, she said with a deep, comical Kittitian accent, “we does *wuk up!*”

During the talent competition, Irvinsia Warner, a then-24 year old Nevisian contestant sang a calypso about older men who prey on young schoolgirls and bribe them to enter into sexual relationships but offering material things.

The other day I was by my daddy's bar  
When this man pull up in a fancy car  
He went by the bar to buy a drink  
Then he look at me and he start to wink

He grab he drank, came over and said hello  
All the time he watching me from head to toe  
He said I look real nice and juicy  
And he ask me if I want a blackberry  
He say he could take good care of me  
He say he could be me sweet sugar daddy  
I said hold up mista a little while  
Don't you know that I am a school child  
He said he don't care if I'm a minor  
We could just keep it under cover  
You come with you sweet talk

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<sup>267</sup> In 2011, Ms. Jamaica Universe, Yendi Phillips hosted the Carnival Queen competition and she did not engender as much widespread distaste. She was noticeably darker-skinned. It is possible that this is one site of contention.

Watching me like a shark  
But you better go take a walk

These men need to stop it. I am in my uniform  
Every time they see me, think they could buy me with Blackberry  
I ain't having none of that. None of that! (gimme! Aye)

We need to tell our politicians  
That should pass legislations  
That would protect we the school children  
From all them worthless perverted men  
Men who just want to take advantage  
Of the innocence and our tender age  
Telling us how we look so sweet and good  
But they only want to mash up our children  
See they hanging out on the street corner  
Just coopin for when school over  
They don't care that in we uniform  
Teasin' us with the blackberry curve and so on

It got a lotta big man in this country  
Who like to meddle with neaga pickney  
They just use their money and influence  
To try and rob me of my innocence  
Although they know that I am under 16 years  
They said that small donkey does have big ears  
But no matter how good me body shape  
To go with me is statutory rape  
Well I know we got some mothers  
Let these men sleep with their daughters  
Take the man money and keep silent  
Child services should lock up these parents  
Well I know I have on me thinking cap  
Ain't no way you gon catch me in none of that

So you can keep your money, you can't convince me to sell my virginity

My life at home is not extremely well  
To tell the truth, things real hard like hell  
So I decide that good education is the way out of this situation  
One day while I was on the way to class  
A male teacher watching me as I pass  
He said if I let him make a move  
He make sure that all my grades improve  
Imagine this dirty, nasty louse  
Asking me to come up by his house  
Telling me to lie to my mommy and tell her I gone to the library  
I said mista move outta me face.  
To the profession you are a big disgrace

Betta leave me alone, and let it be known  
I can make it on my own.



**Figure 16 Irvinisia Warner, 2012-2013 National Carnival Queen Competition. Photo by author.**

Despite the strong association with women's bodies and carnival/carnival music, women have been largely excluded from actual music making during carnival. There are few female calypso queens during annual calypso competitions.<sup>268</sup> The recent addition of a soca monarch competition has also heralded the addition of female artists and performers to the national stage. However, as a Kittitian DJ, now living in Canada, noted in an interview, "Some [women] partake in calypso and the rest in the soca monarch competitions, but none [are] producing music that would be popular to be frequently

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<sup>268</sup> The first National Female Calypso Competition was held in 1995 and "Singing Jackie" (Jacqueline Leader) was the first calypso queen and won that title three times. She continues to be the most consistent female presence in the Calypso King competition. During the 2012 Calypso Competition another female calypsonian, Lady Diva, also competed. No woman has ever won the "National Calypso King" title, although Singing Jackie regularly places within the top three. She competed in the 2012 finals with a calypso entitled, "Time For A Calypso Queen."

played on the road'."<sup>269</sup> In that light, Warner's singing of a calypso is, in itself, noteworthy as an act of secular, female, music making.

Debra Curtis' ethnographic work surrounding sexuality amongst Nevisian women has suggested that sexual-economic transactions such as the one Warner sings about regarding mothers turning a blind eye to the sexual abuse of their children in order to maintain income are common and culturally ingrained.<sup>270</sup> While Warner promotes education and derides some mothers for condoning those types of practices, she also critiques the masculine, anti-woman aspects of the current local education system in a nation where the idea of education goes relatively unquestioned. Warner, singing the entire calypso from the point of view of a young schoolgirl, wears pigtails and a school uniform skirt during her performance while voicing grievance against the state from the perspective of one of the most vilified groups in St. Kitts-Nevis. Her performance overtly opposes statutory rape and other types of sexual violence against women. Further, however, Warner also subtly highlights and critiques the connections between capitalism and consumption (the Blackberry phone and fancy car), female subjugation and sexual violence, and formalized (colonial) education. Doing so at a pageant that is focused primarily on showcasing the potency and importance of a particular type of education, a specific type of respectable speech, and an unquestioned emphasis on the sexualized, black, female body can be regarded as an act of decoloniality.

## **Conclusion**

Tracey Robinson has questioned the effectiveness and ability of real feminist politics to take place within the state given that it is inherently heterosexist and

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<sup>269</sup> Steven Whittaker, Personal Communication, May 29, 2013

<sup>270</sup> Curtis, *Pleasures and Perils*, 114

inextricable from the colonial matrix of power.<sup>271</sup> The insults hurled at the Bajan host were just one example of the fierce nationalism that surrounds the pageant that is funded and promoted by the state and, on the surface, appears to be a vehicle for the promotion of state ideologies. Considering, again, that feminist desires can be, and often are, more than just the opposite of the undesirable, we can think about decoloniality not necessarily just in terms of the oppositionality that the prefix “de” would suggest. Instead, decoloniality refers to ways of thinking and being that are predicated, first, on making evident the colonial forces at play. To that end, I see Warner’s performance as a critique of the coloniality of power that approaches decoloniality through its juxtaposition with her participation in the pageant, itself. Warner’s questioning of the current education system through her description of particular colonial forces, namely patriarchy and capitalist consumption, at the particular event of the pageant that promotes respectability, further highlights the contradiction of coloniality.<sup>272</sup>

The position and actions of the women who publically dance to and participate in the *wylers* scene is decidedly less straightforward. Responses from two my female interlocutors (24 and 21 years old) on Nevis, in reaction to my asking about their interest in *wylers*, illustrate this point:

**Interlocutor 1:** I wouldn’t characterize it as too fast. It is the rhythm, the beat of the people. Local persons are accustomed and revel in it. I think with regards to visitors it may be too fast as they may not be accustomed to the faster tempo and may have trouble keeping the pace or catching the rhythm. But to be honest I don’t think it is even a pace that all locals can meet. [...] But I think the music in

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<sup>271</sup> Robinson, “A Loving Freedom,” 126

<sup>272</sup> Here I am referring to Anibal Quijano’s intervention that coloniality—and modernity as its counterpart—is a set of contradictions. Primarily, coloniality created modernity in the name of “progress” for colonized people. The contradiction, however, is that coloniality and modernity can only exist through the continued subjugation of the people it purports to be ushering toward progress. For more, see Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America.” *International Sociology* 15.2 (2000): 215-232.

general I not too fast. I think it represents the evolution of local music and the free joyous movement of the people.

**Interlocutor 2:** Women my age dwell mostly on the degrading music as it is most attractive. now dont get me wrong, its ok to listen to it. but what you take from it is the issue. they listen to dancehall ; vybz kartel uncle demon etc. the band music they listen to also ...they love the sound of men tellin them to grab "grab up they p&\*\*\*\*" and "wine up on this an tht" etc.<sup>273</sup>

To suggest, wholesale, that sexualized dancing and participation in carnival activities is a matter of decolonial liberation would be to miss the point where the move toward decoloniality actually occurs. As current decolonial scholarship focused on artistic output would suggest, resistance gives way to re-existence.<sup>274</sup> In the same ways that wylers music can be imagined as pushing the boundaries of tempo as the first comment suggests, Kittitian and Nevisian women, too, are aware of the rhetoric surrounding their bodies, and what it *means*, in a largely colonial-minded, 'postcolonial' society, to dance and listen to this music—as illustrated in the second statement.

Following decolonial feminist thought,<sup>275</sup> I imagine these two engagements with wylers as "worlds of meaning."<sup>276</sup> Situated within the legacy of respectability that is inextricably tethered to the nation's control of women's bodies, Kittitian and Nevisian women who participate in *wylers* "make a nomadic journey between the worlds of meaning" by possessing and utilizing "the ability to read a concrete situation of power and consciously chose an ideological position that poses the most adequate opposition to [a] power configuration."<sup>277</sup> I regard this migration between the world of respectability and professionalism and that of wylers, and the mobility that bolsters it, as decolonial in

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<sup>273</sup> Personal Communication, April 18, 2013 Correspondence left in its original form.

<sup>274</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Looking For the Meaning of 'Decolonial Gesture'" *E-Misfórico*

<sup>275</sup> Especially Maria Lugones (2003, 2006) and Vladimirovna (2013)

<sup>276</sup> Tlostanova Madina Vladimirovna. "Transcultural Tricksters Beyond Times and Spaces: Decolonial Chronotopes and Border Selves." *Language, Philology, Culture* 2, no. 3 (2013): 9-31.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.



its refusal to acknowledge *wylers* and its accompanying dances as simply deviations from or oppositional answers to the norm of colonial aesthetics. Instead, it is its own way of sensing and perceiving (tempo) that engages in, as Mignolo would have it, “processes of re-existence, re-surgence and re-emergence of all signs of living in plenitude and harmony that coloniality repressed, suppressed, or disavowed in the name and justification of ‘modernity’ as salvation.”<sup>278</sup> In this light, as my interlocutor sees it, *wylers* is a representation of or, perhaps, an accompaniment to the “movement of the people.”

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<sup>278</sup> Mignolo, “Looking For the Meaning of ‘Decolonial Gesture.’”

## **CHAPTER FIVE KITTTIAN NEVISIAN MUSIC AND NATIONALISM IN THE DIASPORA**

February 18, 2015 marked the first day since 1980 that the St. Kitts Nevis Labour Party, which grew out of the first Labor Union in St. Kitts established in 1940, was not in power in St. Kitts-Nevis. For myself, and many people living on and off of the islands, much of the political campaigns leading up to that momentous day for both the incumbent party and its main opposition (a party known as “Team Unity” or “Unity”)<sup>279</sup> took place in the digital space of online social media websites. Fully utilizing the instantaneity and limitlessness of the Internet, campaigners and event coordinators on both sides of the political line utilized social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to disseminate practical information such as dates and times of party events, and to forward the more sentimental goal of fostering party pride. Both political parties had a special sector geared specifically toward young Kittitians and Nevisians both on the islands and abroad in a concerted effort to encourage young people to vote and participate in the political trajectory of the twin-island nation. The youth sectors of the Unity and Labour parties had an especially visible online presence in the months leading up to the election and in the frenzied days afterward. People in the diaspora have always been an important part of the social imaginary in and around SKN and the 2015 election was no deviation. During this election as had been the case in previous election years, both political parties vying for power chartered flights from major North American cities including Miami, New York City, and Toronto, offering KN citizens living abroad free passage to and from SKN in order to vote. The increased utilization of Internet

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<sup>279</sup> Unity is a new political party made up of members drawn from three historical political factions (ousted members of the Labour party, the People’s Action Movement, and the Concerned Citizens Party).

platforms for transcontinental and trans-generational dialogue, too, added to what felt like a collapsing of the material space between those “at home” and those in the diaspora.

The youth groups associated with the Unity and Labour parties (Youth of Unity and Young Labour, respectively), were especially involved in internet-based campaigns. These groups used their Facebook pages to heavily promote music concerts in an effort to sustain interest in and energy around the elections for young citizens. Team Unity sponsored several concerts that included wylers bands such as Nu Vybes and Small Axe, and what they emphasized as “homegrown” talent.<sup>280</sup> Even in featuring Pumpa, a soca artist who lives in St. Vincent, for the biggest of the music events, the “Love Respect Unity Freedom Fest,” the Facebook promotion heavily-handedly reminded its followers that Pumpa was born and raised in St. Kitts-Nevis and still had a great many family members living on the islands and was thus, “coming home.”<sup>281</sup> Both political parties in encouraging citizens in the diaspora to exercise their rights to vote in person deployed this rhetoric of return.

The Labour Party, similarly, featured music as a consistent part of their political rallies along the election trails. Their ultimate concert was billed as the “Labour One Love Concert” as a play on both popular Rastafari love and unity rhetoric as made famous by Bob Marley, and on the concert’s scheduled date of the evening of Valentine’s Day. Continuing the Jamaican bent, the concert featured Jamaican dancehall artists Aidonia and Cecile and roots reggae singer Antony B alongside local wylers band Small Axe. The Labour Party, lead by Dr. Denzil Douglas, has been criticized for promulgating

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<sup>280</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/TeamUnitySKNYouth>

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

ideas and practices reminiscent of the colonial planter class.<sup>282</sup> Among these colonial tendencies, it has been suggested, is the promotion and valuation of the foreign above the local. Many political developments forwarded by Douglas' government have been cited as demonstrations of Douglas' lack of commitment to St. Kitts and Nevis and his overwhelming disregard of the local community. In 2012, for example, in order to repay domestic banks for sizable loans taken out by the St. Kitts-Nevis government, Douglas proposed a "land-for-debt" swap program. There was a major public outcry against the program that would settle an approximately \$700,000,000 debt for 1,200 acres of former sugar cane field land. The common assumption has been that the land would then be sold to foreign investors without local interests in mind. Former leader of the People's Action Movement (PAM) was quoted in a 2012 newspaper as saying, "The Prime Minister is jeopardizing the ability of Kittitians and Nevisians to have land to build homes, start businesses, go into farming or to will to their children and grandchildren."<sup>283</sup> Fears ran high that this proposed debt-restructuring effort was eerily reminiscent of the social and economic dynamics of the late nineteenth century, post Emancipation era. Capitalizing on this generalized aversion to Douglas' policies, comments on the promotional material for Team Unity, in addition to deriding the Labour Party's colonial-minded affiliation, also emphasized Team Unity's decision to enlist wylers bands and artists with Kittitian-Nevisian heritage, as an example of the party's commitment to "supporting [the] local talent..."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Douglas has faced harsh criticism especially in the past two years since members of his cabinet (lead by Dr. Timothy Harris) submitted a motion of No Confidence against Douglas' leadership on December 11, 2012. The motion was never addressed.

<sup>283</sup> L.K. Hewlett, "Government Swaps Land for Local Bank Debts." The St. Kitts Nevis Times 27 April 2012

<sup>284</sup> Youth of Team Unity St. Kitts Facebook Page  
<https://www.facebook.com/TeamUnitySKNYouth/photos/a.375400352529591.80163.144718522264443/789586651110957/?type=1&theater> accessed 25 February 2015.

The events of the 2015 election not only highlight the tensions and negotiations that coalesce around issues of music, migration, and the diaspora, but they also display the particular manner in which wylers participates in the fabric of Kittitian Nevisian social life. What is commonly referred to as “political tribalism” characterizes politics in SKN that have, historically, divided citizens along party lines, especially in the months leading up to elections. In playing for the “Love Respect Unity Freedom Fest” and the “Labour One Love Concert,” these wylers bands not only actively engaged in but also effectively delinked from the underlying factionalism inherent to politics in SKN. Wylers, and the peculiar brand of participation of wylers bands such as Kollision Band, Nu Vybes, and Small Axe on both sides of the political party line is, I argue, another example of the untimely participation—participation that undermines traditional patterns of engagement-- that anchors wylers’ usefulness as a sonic context for decolonial being/doing. Further, what emerges from this political focus on wylers and small island soca as music from “home,” versus the international or foreign—here represented by Jamaican dancehall acts-- is the underlying tension attendant to negotiations of the relationships between the nation, culture, and its diaspora.

### **Carnival 2013-14 International Night**

In the several months leading up to the February 2015 election, the interrelatedness and interstices of these themes was, again, highlighted by events surrounding the 2013-14 St. Kitts-Nevis National Carnival. While the Christmastime season typically features ostensibly local events that underscore the carnival’s relationship to Kittitian-Nevisian heritage, such as the carnival queen pageant, calypso king and queen, and soca monarch show, during the Christmas Carnival season of 2013-14, the St. Kitts Ministry of Culture sought to re-implement an “international night” concert as an addition to the carnival activity lineup. The proposed concert, mimicking

the St. Kitts Music Festival that happens at the end of June annually, would feature performances by acts such as Jamaican lover's rock reggae artist Beers Hammond, Jamaican Dancehall artist Aiadonia, and American R&B singer Maya. Fearing that the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture were losing sight of carnival as a celebration of authentically local, Kittitian-Nevisian cultural celebrations, citizens abroad and on the islands voiced their dismay on online forums, social media websites, and radio stations. In an article posted on SKNVibes.com, a correspondent notes that in asking random citizens about how they felt about the international night, locals were unanimously ambivalent about such an event and would have more enthusiastically supported a concert comprised exclusively of Kittitian-Nevisian artists:

A unanimous amount of persons welcomed the suggestion of having our very own Calypso and Soca artiste perform onstage one more time without rules or competition. 'I would ah rada they give dem men and women the money because I believe they did a good job this year and duh could ah come in handy foh dem, because singing is not no big business', a woman said. But it was no surprise that many of the people on the streets believed if it were an event in Jamaica, none of the Federation's artistes could have made it on that island's stage to perform. 'Yuh think if they got music festival dem gon send fuh awe like how we does send fuh dem. I mean dem does got some alright tunes but Carnival is we ting. Look dem man like Mr. Hype and Janus, dem man foh the first time enter dem competition and prove dem selves. Why we don't support dem eh?' one female Rasta said.<sup>285</sup>

The controversial event was ill fated, in that torrential rain forced event planners to cancel the concert after only one artist had performed. Interestingly, the only artist who was able to take the stage that day was a Kittitian artist, Infamus, a dancehall-alternative pop singer/rapper.

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<sup>285</sup> Staff Reporter, "Review of International Night." <http://www.sknvibes.com/news/newsdetails.cfm/83649> accessed 9 January 2014.

The popular cartoon series the “Toon Center” again, provides additional insight into the boundaries of the discussion. Similar to the comic strips describing local sentiment surrounding women’s bodies and dance (Chapter 4), a “Toon Center” cartoon depicted a personification of carnival in contrast with that of international night. While carnival is sitting on the ground panhandling in tattered, dirty clothes, international night is flaunting a gold tooth and expensive, urban-style clothing. Several pairs of hands are out of the frame, shoving dollar bills into international night’s face. While Carnival is lamenting, “Look how they killin’ me?” International Night is exclaiming, “Keep it coming.” It is notable that while the “g” is removed from killing in carnival, the g on “coming” is emphasized in the speech bubble for international night. This subtle reference to local, colloquial culture versus international or “proper” manners of speech is representative of widespread sentiments that the foreign and international are still held in higher regard by local officials, despite the pervasiveness of rhetoric that promotes the local. One commenter on the “Toon Center” comic, claiming to be from New York City, noted, “St. Kitts is becoming too ‘international.’ There is no ‘Local’ anymore! Culture gone, Traditions dead! Lawdo!”<sup>286</sup> Here is an example of one mode of interaction adopted by the SKN diasporic community with respect to local music (looking for home and history, that is).<sup>287</sup> While locals and nationals abroad both reject international night, the grounds for rejection at home, in this instance, center on more

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<sup>286</sup> Comment 1 November 2013 <http://www.sknvibes.com/toons/details.cfm?Idz=69> Accessed January 9, 2014.

<sup>287</sup> Carol Muller’s text on Sathima Bea Benjamin on musical belonging and exile offers a thoughtful overview of music, diaspora and notions of home. See Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking in Jazz* Duke University Press, 2011. See also Ingrid Monson *African Diaspora* and Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) for a discussion of the creation of a diasporic identity through music.

practical economic concerns, whereas critiques from abroad address diasporic nationalist sentiments about culture and change.

While never explicitly stated in this particular context, much of the anxiety over International Night, the loss of culture, and its relationship to economic concerns mirrors the parameters of Kittitian-Nevisian ambivalence to tourism. Shalini Puri has, in this light, regarded Caribbean tourism as a necessary evil that forces Caribbean communities to pander to foreign tourist sensibilities.<sup>288</sup> In the case of “International Night,” the explicit celebration of foreign music as an effort to boost tourism figures as a direct contradiction to a celebration of culture and heritage. The tensions inherent to the prevalence and importance of tourism to the economic survival of SKN are related to and representative of the numerous negotiations of diaspora, music, and a Kittitian-Nevisian tradition of transnationalism via migration that continue to take place in SKN. The following discussion explores the interconnectedness of these themes away from the islands, in the North American diaspora.

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<sup>288</sup> Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 12.





Figure 17 “International Night” Toon Center cartoon<sup>289</sup>

### Migration and Benevolent Associations

On the back of a copy of the “Voice of Nevis” newsletter chronicling the events of the second year of the New York chapter of *Nevisians in America*, there are handwritten lyrics to what had been a song in progress. Within the rhyming narrative of the calypso-style song, we learn of an interaction between a Nevisian man and young woman born in Nevis who was brought to the United States as a young child:

Well she say she from in Queen City,  
 But she left there since she small  
 All these years she in New York City and she ain't went back at all  
 But she hear 'bout de festivity  
 That we does have down here annually  
 And how its' filled with excitement a real cultural event.<sup>290</sup>  
 So right there she tell me she “coming for '83.  
 And this is important, let me tell you just what I want”  
 She say she want mas-arama, brass-arama, plenty jamma  
 And she want to have plenty action in de hot sun, satisfaction  
 So she want a man who could jam iron throughout the celebration  
 So I tell she, “come...”<sup>291</sup>

<sup>289</sup> Reproduced here with permission from SKNVibes.com

<sup>290</sup> In the recorded version the lyrics are, “But she hear 'bout de festivity that we does have down here annually/ and she want to come enjoy this thing and check out she family.”

<sup>291</sup> “The Voice of Nevis” 1977

The young girl, although a virtual stranger to “Queen City,” a local nickname for Nevis as a counterpart to “Sugar City” St. Kitts, is apparently taken by the very idea of the music and reveling native to Culturama celebrations in Nevis. Although in the final version of the song, the young woman migrates to Washington D.C. instead of New York City, she is, among other things, interested in visiting Nevis in order to attend Culturama and also to “check out “ her Nevisian family. Early in 1983, the song was shipped to Nevis to be played on the radio and sold during the late summer Culturama season. “It did pretty well,” notes Swanston, “but it was more of a cultural thing. It was a sacrifice financially to produce and cut the record.”<sup>292</sup>

Culturama, a celebration of traditional Nevisian music and arts, was a carnival-like festival that began in 1974. The annual event emerged, partly, due to tensions between St. Kitts and Nevis that were exacerbated by what has been called the “Christena Disaster” or simply, “Christena”-- the name of a passenger ferry that traveled regularly between St. Kitts and Nevis. On August 1, 1970, the boat containing some three hundred passengers—most of whom were Nevisians—rolled and sank, killing approximately 250 people. That a disproportionate amount of Nevisians versus Kittitians died during the tragedy added to what was already a tumultuous political time between the islands. Much of the political turmoil stemmed from the longstanding “double colonization” of Nevis under the control of St. Kitts. As Whitman Browne describes, “Out of honesty on one hand, and out of opportunism on the other, the disaster became a rallying point on Nevis and on St. Kitts, for anti-government sentiments and to emphasize the need for

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<sup>292</sup> Lincoln “Santoy” Swanston, Interview, February 15, 2015.

sociopolitical changes.”<sup>293</sup> One such sociopolitical change occurred within the realm of music and folk arts. The Christena Disaster aggravated secessionist and Nevisian “nationalist” sentiments and encouraged a move away from the Nevisian “historic inferiority complex to Kitti[t]ians.”<sup>294</sup> Culturama, then, came about as part of a Nevisian thrust to disassociate from the Christmas carnival on St. Kitts and “the government on St. Kitts saw Culturama as a challenge to its sovereignty on Nevis. Thus, the celebration became both a subtle force and a powerful vehicle for cultural renewal and human survival in the aftermath of *Christena*.”<sup>295</sup>

During this time of political upheaval in Nevis, Calvin “Cabo” Howell spearheaded the creation of The Nevis Dramatic and Cultural Society which was primarily concerned with preserving dying traditions such as Christmas sports, folk handicrafts, and other elements of what was considered folk “heritage.” Howell, notably, returned to Nevis in the early 1970s after spending time in St. Thomas and Canada and it is noted that his time away further encouraged him to preserve the art forms of his youth. In this regard, Karen Fog Olwig has suggested that, at least in the mid 1980s, in addition to having been created by an return migrant, Culturama had largely been supported by Nevisians living abroad a celebration of “the Nevis which may be associated with this group of people, before the undoing of village life and the drastic influx of Western material goods and tourism.”<sup>296</sup> In this light, For Swanston and many other Kittitians and Nevisians living in New York City, going “back home” through music

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<sup>293</sup> Browne, *The Christena Disaster*, 7.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity*, 190. Contemporarily, Culturama is, in many ways, very similar to Christmas carnival in St. Kitts. There is a Jouvert parade with bands and floats as well as kitschy events such as the “Emancipation Jump Up” party that plays on the event’s secondary celebration of the Emancipation of the Caribbean slaves on August 1, 1834.

in order to participate, in some capacity, in annual carnival-like festivities was by 1983, a matter of tradition.

Swanston's song about Culturama played on previous experiences with carnival celebrations in SKN, but was based largely on an "interpretation" of Culturama given that this particular iteration of carnival in Nevis began two years after Swanston left the Caribbean to live in the Bronx, New York.<sup>297</sup> He notes, "That's why I wrote it from that angle, a girl who left but wanted to be part of what was happening at home, because I had never really been [to Culturama] but I knew about it and wanted my music to be part of it even if I couldn't make it back." Swanston's desire to participate in the events at home while living abroad represents just one appeal to "tradition" and "culture" through music by Nevisians and Kittitians abroad.

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<sup>297</sup> Swanston's particular migratory route to the United States included stops on other small Caribbean islands such as Anguilla and Tortola where he played the bass and electric guitar in soca and calypso bands.



Figure 18 "The Voice of Nevis" Front (1977)

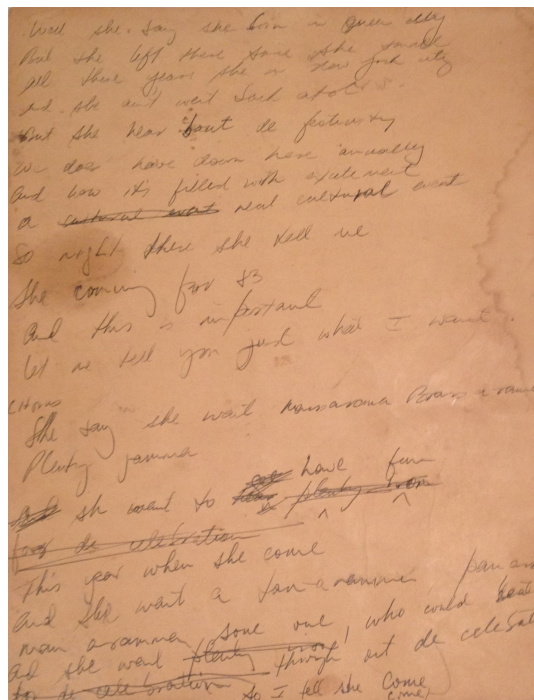


Figure 19 "The Voice of Nevis" Back (1977)

*Nevisians In America*, the organization of Nevisians in the diaspora for which the “Voices of Nevis” newsletter was published, was one of many nationalist organizations supporting Kittitians and Nevisians living in North America in the 1980s. These types of benevolent associations, along with the Episcopal Church, have been at the center of physical, ritual, and symbolic cultural connections to the island homes of Kittitians and Nevisians and their descendants living in the North American diaspora. Organizations such as Nevisians in America “had their roots in large nineteenth-century migrations from the south and the Caribbean,” where among more practical functions, “acquiring social distinction was an important built-in feature”<sup>298</sup> While immigration figures from the early twentieth century did not account for particular islands of origin, and instead regarded the entire Caribbean as a whole, it has been suggested that approximately 12,000 of the 80,000 West Indian immigrants in the United States between 1901 and 1921 were from St. Kitts-Nevis.<sup>299</sup> Immigration to the United States waned during the years directly surrounding WWII. Between 1952 and 1976 stringent laws limited immigration from each British Colony and, in response, Kittitian and Nevisian migrants sought legal migration and work in Britain, instead.<sup>300</sup> While official reports reflect fewer migrants from St. Kitts and Nevis during these years, it is likely that illegal immigration maintained a steady flow of Kittitians and Nevisians to the United States and Eastern Canada. In this context, homeland associations would have been an additionally integral

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<sup>298</sup> Irma Watkins-Owens. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 65. In post-emancipation St. Kitts-Nevis, laws were enacted to prevent freed blacks from leaving the islands thus depriving the planter class of an available work force. By 1840, however, many of the more egregious anti-migration laws were abolished and “hundreds of black Kittitians and Nevisians were leaving for the southern Caribbean legally and illegally via small boats and large” as they were “attracted by high wages at their destination” and dissatisfied “with conditions at home.” Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants*, 85.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>300</sup> In 1952 US immigration from each island of the British West Indies was limited to 100 persons per year. The quota was raised to 600 in 1976 (*Ibid.*, 157).

source of support for undocumented migrants as they “helped to stabilize life in an evolving community and then provide upward mobility in it.”<sup>301</sup>

Watkins-Owens notes that, “activities promoted by Caribbean homeland associations regularly brought older and more recent immigrants together at social, educational, and charitable functions. Among these were annual boat ride, picnics, and Thanksgiving programs to which other Caribbean associations were invited to purchase tickets.”<sup>302</sup> Music was always an important part of these types of social and educational programs sponsored by benevolent societies, and the homeland associations that are active today still hold similar events. Between the post-independence era of the late 1980s to the present the form of the homeland associations changed to accommodate the growing and increasingly established presence of Kittitian-Nevisians in the North American diaspora. Groups from the late nineteenth century continuing through the 1970s focused primarily on national/island affiliation with association names such as “Sons and Daughters of St. Christopher and Nevis” and “Nevisians in America.” By the early 1980s, however, groups that recognized a more assimilative Kittitian-Nevisian identity (1983), such as the Kittitian American Benevolent Association (KABA), emerged.

By the late 1990s, activities similar to those of turn-of-the-century associations were sponsored by spinoff groups based on both homeland affiliation and on shared interests outside of origins, such as high school alumni groups and sports and recreational interests. The change from nationalist to personal interest groups may appear, on the one hand, to signal a departure from the core interests of the first wave of homeland associations. However, these interest affiliation groups typically view their specialization as another, more articulated link to homeland “culture” and “heritage.”

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<sup>301</sup> Irma Watkins-Owens *Blood Relations*, 65.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

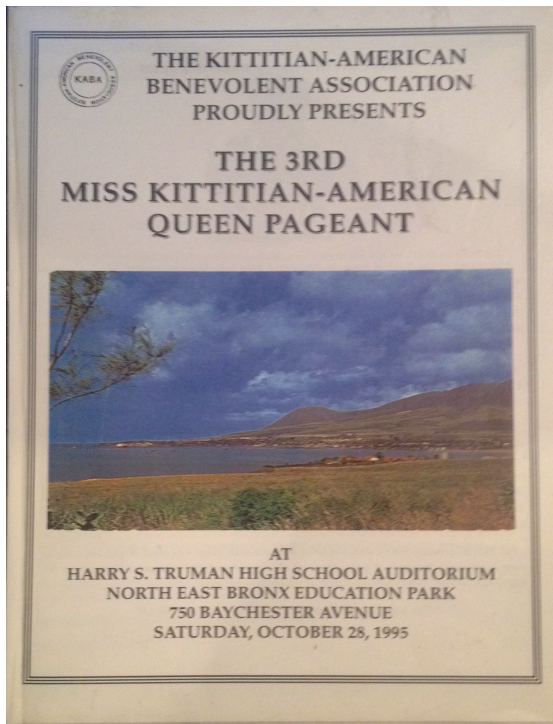
The protagonist in Swanston's song, who likely would have been a member of a homeland association like Nevisians In America, is an apt representation of the Kittitian-Nevisian in the North American diaspora who is searching for connections to home via culture and tradition that is conceived of and manifested musically.<sup>303</sup> Embedded in both the song's text and its production and performance are notions of migration, home, and culture as mediated by music and dance.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> The figure of the Caribbean native in the diaspora crops up a great deal in soca and calypso since the 1950s. See for example, "Mas in Brooklyn" (1969) by The Mighty Sparrow as an early, popular example.

<sup>304</sup> These themes have illuminated much of the recent history of thought and scholarship in diaspora studies. Discussions of diaspora were, especially in relation to the Caribbean, initially grounded in quantitative interests in the migration and mobility of ethnic and racial groups with an emphasis on national borders. Specifically, studies of migration paid particular attention to rates and modes of integration and assimilation of diasporic groups into the culture and customs of the host countries. Gradually, in response to concerns about representation of diasporic groups, focus turned to the manners in which members of particular diasporas are able to enact modes of resistance such that the resistance model "depict[s] migrants as people who travel to other countries to escape social and economic problems caused by many years of colonial and neocolonial exploitation ... but who refuse to subordinate themselves to ... oppression that they encounter in receiving countries." Olwig. *Caribbean Journeys*, 273. With a similar interest in population movements and music performance in the diaspora, ethnomusicology has had similar shifts in an attempt to reconcile the competing discourses inherent to diaspora studies. The Caribbean, especially small Caribbean islands such as St. Kitts and Nevis have, since the beginning of ethnomusicology and musically oriented cultural anthropology, played an integral role in early permutations of diaspora studies. As noted in Chapter Two, early claims of African diasporic cultural productions or Africanisms in The Americas were bolstered by ethnographic work in the circum-Caribbean locations such as Haiti and Suriname.





**Figure 20 KABA Pageant Program (1995)**



**Figure 21 Alumni group Independence celebration program(2014)**



**Figure 22 Cricket Club Gala Program (2001)**

My experiences in the KN diaspora in NYC and Toronto illustrate the far reach of these themes in the dynamic range of music consumed and deployed in the diaspora. These case studies of music and dance amongst the KN communities participating in the life of benevolent homeland associations in NYC and Toronto demonstrate a different orientation to intra-Caribbean nationalism abroad than is the social norm on the islands. Where extra-national (primarily Jamaican and Trinidadian) music sometimes constitutes a threat to national culture on the islands as evidenced by the reactions to the Labour party concert and the threat of an “International Night,” it is very regularly deployed for the sake of national, or regional belonging in the diaspora. In both cases,

there is a shifting terrain of association and much room for maneuvering the relationships between these themes.

### **Cool Sessions Brass in New York City**

In celebration of the anniversary of St. Kitts-Nevis' independence many homeland organizations hold celebratory events that resemble those held by benevolent associations of the early twentieth century. These occasions, like most Caribbean events, have food and music as their focus (boat rides, dinners, dances, church services, breakfasts). The Wembly Athletic Club, the location of the "Anniversary Independence Celebration" I attended on Saturday, September 21 2013, is the most recent space for what was, in 1954, initially conceived of as a benevolent association for Jamaican immigrants to New York City. The club, whose official purpose is to "enhance the Social and Cultural relationship of it's members," (sic)<sup>305</sup> is a bi-level building in the Northeast section of the Bronx that is often rented out to other homeland associations and sports clubs.

The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Independence Celebration was one such event that boasted four musical acts, Cool Sessions Brass from St. John, US.V.I, Klymaxx Band, a "jam band" formed in The Bronx, Sobie, a Bajan calypsonian and Kent, a calypso singer from St. Kitts. The flier advertised that the designer of the national flag of SKN, Edris Lewis, and the composer of the KN national anthem, "Oh Land of Beauty," Kenrick Georges, would be "special guests" of the evening. With the exception of these special guests and the calypsonian Kent, who did not perform that evening, none of the musical acts were from SKN, despite the decidedly nationalist bent of the celebration.

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305. "About Us." Wembly Athletic Club [www.wembleyac.com](http://www.wembleyac.com) Accessed February 25, 2015. Emphasis via capitalization in the original.



Figure 23 Independence Dance Flyer

Cool Sessions Brass was the musical highlight of the evening. The band, hailing from the Virgin Islands, is well known in the Eastern Caribbean as a band that easily moves between local Caribbean genres. They have competed in Road March competitions on St. Thomas and been a welcomed act at the World Creole Festival in Dominica—a testament to their versatility. They began their set at the independence celebration by warming up with a salsa song, “Brujeria” by the El Gran Combo off of their 1979 album “Aqui No Se Sienta Nadie.” Replete with a brass section of two trumpets and a trombone, the band’s choice of song was moderately received by the approximately 80 people in the room. A few couples danced with very basic salsa moves but, as a whole, the crowd was not particularly moved. Still, the salsa did not seem

overwhelmingly out of place given our location in the Bronx, NY.<sup>306</sup> The adaptability of the band and of the setting to an orchestral salsa piece seemed to mark the occasion as a celebration of Caribbean diaspora as much as a celebration of KN independence.

It was close to 12:15am when the band really began their set, which consisted largely of the top soca songs from the past three years. What sets Cool Sessions apart from most of the popular bands from the Eastern Caribbean is their female lead singer who covered many of the most popular soca songs of the two previous carnival seasons. While none of the songs were from SKN, that the band played many of the songs noticeably faster than the original could be regarded as a nod to a distinctly Kittitian if not eastern Caribbean, small island style of playing (See introduction).<sup>307</sup> The crowd was made up of a generally older diasporic Kittitian-Nevisians who, conventionally, would not have been interested in wylers as a newer style of KN music. Cool Sessions, then, became a representation of diasporic KN by playing interpretations of pan-Caribbean hits at the particular time and space of a celebration of independence in New York City.

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306. In 2008 there were 1.4 million Puerto Ricans living in the New York Metropolitan area. Kurt Bauman, Sonia Collazo, and Camille Ryan. "Profile of the Puerto Rican Population in United States and Puerto Rico: 2008." In *Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division*. Dallas, Texas, 2010

<sup>307</sup>. As an example, the popular Trinidadian soca song "Wutless" by Kes The Band was recorded at 120bpm and was played by Cool Sessions Brass at 125bpm. It should be noted, however, that given the ubiquity of DJs and the practice of speeding up and slowing down tempos to suite a particular venue or time, it is possible that original or recorded tempo of any contemporary song does not have much bearing on the tempo a particular audience may be familiar with.



**Figure 24 Cool Sessions Brass Instrumentalists.<sup>308</sup>**

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<sup>308</sup> Photo by Jefroy Morrishaw





**Figure 25 Cool Sessions Brass Lead Singer, Tishelle Knight (center)<sup>309</sup>**

### **A Boat Ride Dance in Toronto**

In Toronto, Caribana, the largest Caribbean carnival celebration in North America has become an occasion for homeland associations, such as St. Kitts and Nevis Association of Toronto (SKNAT) established in 1970 to “Promote unity, contribute to Canadian society, and assist charitable causes,” to hold celebratory events. SKNAT’s annual boat ride is typically held at the end of July in anticipation of Caribana, which is always held during the first weekend in August. Importantly, in spite of its sponsorship by a homeland association, the SKNAT boat ride, like Caribana, is a celebration of pan-Caribbean culture. The DJ who provided the music for the event, in lieu of a live band, represented this celebration of the broad scope of Caribbean culture in the eclectic music choices made.

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<sup>309</sup> Photo by Jefroy Morrishaw

I had highly anticipated attending the SKNAT boat ride dance, and I was particularly interested in scoping out the scene. Caribana for my family, like many other diasporic Caribbean families, has been an occasion around which extended family members dispersed across the globe converge. I have been regularly traveling from New York City to Toronto since the late 1980s to visit my grandmother and five of my mother's nine siblings, who all lived in Ontario, Canada. A distinct memory of my childhood centers on the adults dressing up, drinking socially, while laughing and talking in preparation for "The St. Kitts Dance." Customarily, the children, myself included, were left at home with my grandmother. In July of 2013, then, I became expressly aware of the passage of time and the emergence of a new generation of Kittitian-Nevisian diasporans when I attended the SKNAT boat ride which advertised a "mardi gras" theme complete with green and purple beads and masquerade eye-masks.

This particular boat ride was relatively well attended even at \$50 a ticket.<sup>310</sup> As is customary at Kittitian-Nevisian events, admission included a home cooked meal—baked chicken, rice and peas, salad—and the promise of good music for dancing. Although most Kittitian-Nevisian events start much later than their stated start-time, the venue of a boat and the possibility of missing embarkation time of 10pm was enough of a threat to convince passengers to be on time. Unlike most other nighttime events hosted by Kittitians or Nevisians, there was not the usual staggering of arrivals late into the evening. Consequently, the dance floor, which happened to be between the entrance of the boat and the bar, remained packed until the cruise ended at 2:30am.

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<sup>310</sup> Given the 475-person capacity of the ship, I have estimated that there were approximately 400 people in attendance. <http://www.torontocruises.com/> accessed 10 April 2015



Regarding the choice to use a DJ instead of a band from St. Kitts or Nevis, Felicity Leader, a longtime member of the association who was, in the early 1990s, an organizing member of these Caribana dances noted that throughout the 1970s and 1980s homeland associations were known for hiring bands from the home island as part of the main draw of this type of celebratory evening. These dinner-dances brought together large swaths of not only Toronto's Kittitian-Nevisian diasporic community, but also often members of other global metropolises who would have been visiting for Caribana. As such, they were and continue to be a major source of the homeland association's fundraising efforts. Prior to the 1990s it was customary for visiting bands to help to offset costs by agreeing to stay at the homes of volunteering Kittitians and Nevisians in the host country. When bands, including wylers bands such as Nu Vybes and Small Axe began requesting to be put up in hotel rooms, instead, costs associated with inviting live bands severely limited the ability for homeland associations to profit from these events. "We haven't had a band since 1994," said Leader.<sup>311</sup> Hiring DJs, occasionally from the Caribbean and largely from Toronto, was a much more financially sound decision.

While the 2013 boat ride event was a celebration of Kittitian-Nevisian culture through music, the vast majority of the music was culled from islands other than SKN. Particularly big hits with the crowd included "Palance" by JW and Blaze, which won the Road March competition in Trinidad in 2010 and Trinidadian calypsonian and soca star David Rudder's 1998 song "High Mas." Not incidentally, both songs demand group participation: "Palance" is also a dance that requires dancers to hop on one foot and move quickly to one side of the room then change direction. Dancers on the boat that evening were especially amused by the disruption caused by the shifting weight on the

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<sup>311</sup> Felicity Leader, Personal communication, March 8, 2015

boat. Similarly infectious, “High Mas” features a catchy call and response section that encourages listeners to sing “Amen” in response to Rudder’s prayer-like incantations. At the height of the evening, around 1am, while the boat rocked back and forth violently in Lake Ontario, the DJ played “Unstoppable Force,” a nationalist tune in a wylers style by Kittitian Calypsonian turned politician “King Konris”:

Unstoppable force when we move as one  
Let the whole world know they can’t keep SK down  
And when we reach world stage a lotta dust go raise  
Yeh we small but we tallawah<sup>312</sup>  
And we go tun up de place  
Tun it up, tun it up, tun it up  
So tell dem sen on and sen on and bring whatever and whenever  
We go conquer dem, we go better dem  
Sen on and sen on and bring whatever and whenever  
We go conquer dem  
Boy if you see us how we Jump (together)  
Man look how we wave (together)  
Everybody bounce (together)  
Man we on de move (together)  
Everybody work (together)  
Unstoppable force (together)  
Man dis aint no joke  
We are an unstoppable force

“Unstoppable Force” was one song in an approximately 10 minute long set of Kittitian wylers songs from the most prominent wylers bands, especially Nu Vybes and Small Axe. Music from St. Kitts-Nevis, specifically, made up a very small portion of the evening’s playlist. The songs played that evening that ranged from Jamaican roots reggae, dancehall, 1980s calypso, wylers, contemporary soca, and Motown soul, however, were indicative of the patterns of migration and transnationalism that are integral to the condition of being Kittitian and Nevisian. More practically, the blending of styles and genres from around the region mirrors the melding together of Caribbean cultures that characterizes the broad Caribbean community in North American cities

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<sup>312</sup> This can be understood as “tall or what,” meaning we are tall, proud, and on par with the rest.

that boast a notable Caribbean population. Constance Sutton has famously described the “Caribbeanization” of New York City by noting the changes enacted as a result mass immigration from the Caribbean after 1965 that included, “new popular arts, food, music, and dance.”<sup>313</sup> In New York City where it is common for Italian Pizzerias to sell Jamaican beef patties (often with cheese), and in Toronto where Caribana is a citywide celebration of Caribbean music, food, and dance, the broad scope of Caribbean culture is integral to an understanding of Kittitian-Nevisian diasporic identity.

Caribbean regionalism, as a broadening of island-specific nationalism into a more Caribbean wide or West Indian awareness, emerged as a product of continuous Caribbean migration to major cities such as London, New York, and Toronto. Bajan novelist and poet George Lamming writes in *The Pleasures of Exile*, that Anglophone Caribbean solidarity developed amongst immigrants in Britain who were originally from Caribbean British colonies. In the United States, however, his Caribbean regionalism moved beyond his colonial affiliation with Britain as a “West Indian”: “I find that I refrain from saying that I am from the West Indies, for it implies British colonial limitation. I say rather, I am from the Caribbean, hoping the picture of French and Spanish West Indies will be taken for granted.”<sup>314</sup> I suggest that the broadly-cast Caribbean regionalism Lamming points to here is reflected in the music that accompanies the homeland association events, despite the overall aim to support nationalist endeavors.

My changing perspective on these types of events and associations firstly as something for my parents’ generation, and later as an attendee—with my young adult

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<sup>313</sup> Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*, Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1987, 18.

<sup>314</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 215

cousins from Toronto and Leeds, England who were visiting at the same time—offers some context for thinking about the changes in music at these events over the last thirty years. Specifically, my own experience is indicative of that of large swath of the Kittitian-Nevisian diasporic community in North America. While homeland associations were once a necessity for survival in a foreign host city, these organizations have, over the course of time, become a part of a stable Caribbean-in-North-America culture. Consequently, it is my suggestion that instead of providing an essential link to Caribbean islands at home, these homeland organizations, and the events they hold such as the boat ride, serve to solidify North American Caribbean regionalism amongst the second and third generation Kittitian-American immigrants who now make up the bulk of the attendees.

That year, I was one of the 1.3 million people at the Caribana parade. Taking its cues from Trinidad Carnival, the parade features floats with bands and DJs, bright, sparkly, and elaborate costumes and an overwhelming array of food, crafts, and wares. Preparing for the event as someone who was not participating in a troupe meant that I tied and pinned as many items emblazoned with the St. Kitts-Nevis flag as I could reasonably fit on my body. As a member of the small island Caribbean diaspora, part of the excitement of the parade is spotting and catching-up with other members of the Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora. I walked through the parade with Darnel Leader, a first-generation Canadian in his late twenties whose parents immigrated to Toronto from St. Kitts in the early 1970s. After spotting several Kittitian-Nevisian flags and failing to recognize the people to whom they were attached, Darnel turned to me with a raised brow, stage whispering over the crowd, “I don’t know *anybody*.” The idea that he did not recognize a couple dozen people in a crowd of over a million may, initially, seem unreasonable. However, the close-knit nature of nationalist Caribbean diasporic

communities in North America, as noted above, cannot be overstated. That visiting bands before the mid 1990s were accustomed to staying in the homes of homeland association members was not just a matter of frugal business practice—it was a practice that took hold as a means of survival for newly arrived immigrants. In this way, people who knew one another from having attended the same schools, or having lived in the same neighborhoods in St. Kitts and Nevis often became lifelines (a place to stay before finding permanent housing, an official sponsor in applying for citizenship) in the host country. It was typical, then, for Darnel to remember the Kittitian-Nevisian community from his parents' era as an intimate network of familiar faces. The contemporary reality is that members of the Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora have multiplied, many enjoy an increased degree of mobility (or feel less of a need to call the Caribbean *home*), and have given way to second and third generations of Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora members who are connected to “home” (and one another) differently.

Return migration and diaspora tourism,<sup>315</sup> the type in which the protagonist in Swanston's song sought to participate, figures prominently in the determination of the type of connections that are created and maintained in North America. This dynamic can be seen with regards to music, and wylers specifically. Ashanti Maynard, a young woman in her early twenties is the grandchild of a Nevisian émigré to Brooklyn, New York in the early 1980s. Her mother was born in St. Thomas and moved to New York with her Nevisian mother as an adolescent. Ashanti is very active in the West Indian music and dance scene in New York and is avid consumer of soca, reggae, and dancehall music. While she “strongly identifies” as a “Caribbean American,” via her mother and her

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<sup>315</sup> For more on diaspora tourism see Erik H. Cohen, *Youth Tourism to Israel: Educational Experiences of the Diaspora* (Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2008) and Ann Reed, *Pilgrimage Tourism of Diaspora Africans to Ghana* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

grandmother's roots in St. Thomas and Nevis, she does not listen to wylers and said she has "not really ever heard of wylers or soca or calypso coming out of St. Kitts and Nevis."<sup>316</sup> Not incidentally, Ashanti has never been to St. Kitts and Nevis and her connection to the islands is largely mediated through regional Caribbean affiliation. Musically, this translates to an affinity for music, as she notes, from "Jamaica, Trinidad, Grenada, and Barbados."<sup>317</sup> I posit here that for Ashanti, the Caribbeanization of New York and, I would argue Toronto as well, created a space that could allow one to maintain a strong and intentional regional Caribbean identity that, in many cases, erases the necessity for a particularly nationalist connection to any one island in particular.

However, for people of the Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora, including Darnel who has returned to St. Kitts-Nevis annually for Christmas and carnival every year from 1986 to 2012, wylers offers a sonic marker of specialized identification with St. Kitts-Nevis beyond North American West Indian community affiliation. This, then, points to interesting differences between the discursive affiliation of wylers on the island with a low class, uneducated, and crass demographic given that Kittitian-Nevisians in the diaspora typically must attain a high level of economic mobility to experience St. Kitts-Nevis Carnival and foster an appreciation for wylers music. On this topic, Darnel commented, "I haven't been in two years after going every year for my whole life and I think the connection fades exponentially over every year [I've missed] based on my experience."<sup>318</sup> Despite not being regularly invited to play for homeland association dances, some wylers bands such as Small Axe and Kollision band do play at other venues such as West Indian clubs like The Pyramid Lounge in the Bronx. Meaning, there are opportunities to hear live wylers bands in the North American diaspora. However, as

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<sup>316</sup> Ashanti Maynard, Interview, April 15, 2014

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Darnel Leader, Personal communication, March 8 2015

Darnel notes, “the experience of Jouvert and local, small island carnival is essential to appreciating [wylers], and I think string band, and big drum, too.”<sup>319</sup>

### **Nationalism and Internationalism**

Most of the Kittitians and Nevisians in the diaspora I encountered who live the majority of the year away from SKN were disinterested in a discussion of wylers or “ban’ music.” The interview questions about fastness and wylers I used in SKN that solicited responses that pointed to issues of interpretability, gender and sexuality, musicianship, and aesthetics as extensions of tempo and fastness, had very little traction in my interactions in NYC and Toronto. When I asked Lincoln Swanston if he felt wylers was too fast, he noted that the tempo is too fast, especially for older people who don’t want to exert the amount of energy it would take to keep up with the beat. Shane, a DJ in Toronto, commented that wylers is “faster, but still manageable.”<sup>320</sup>

Caribbean culture has become so ubiquitous in New York City and Toronto that a melting-pot version of Caribbeanness or Caribbean regionalism has become the norm. In SKN, there is tension surrounding the international where different things—a differently understood livelihood-- are at stake. In a small place where the idea of “The Nation” is not nearly as practically useful as it is in Canada or the United States, navigating the tensions between “nation” and “culture” is a different task than it is for people living abroad. What these comments illustrate is that despite participating in the same events, and celebrating the same times— Christmas Carnival or Culturama— differently situated (geographically, economically, socially) Kittitians-Nevisians experience and engage with what’s happening “at home” distinctly. They perceive the stakes to be different and, thus, react accordingly.

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Shane Whittaker, Personal communication, May 16, 2013

The condition of being part of the Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora abroad, and the perception attendant to it, constitutes a third space that offers additional context to the responses to wylers on the islands that index extra-musical fastness as well as rhythmic tempo. Here, a return to cognitive science and tempo perception may offer some insight. Being “too fast” is a matter of perception that is dependent on factors such as, in this case, proximity to the sounds (see Chapter Two). Where members of the Kittitian-Nevisian diaspora, then, are not forced to engage with wylers unless they specifically seek it out and are in a socioeconomic position to experience it, the sounds themselves do not generally figure as “too fast.” Further, that wylers is “too fast” is not a point of concern to many of the people is instructive. It forces us to think more broadly about the connection between music and geography—specifically the experience of being on small islands and, more, the geographic immobility (forced or chosen), of those who reject wylers as “too fast” but are regularly subjected to its vibrations on the islands.

### **Conclusion**

Wylers’ very existence as an omnipresent genre with no set name, recognizable largely through bodily representations of its rhythm, is indicative of its tangential relationship to prevailing dichotomies such as sense and nonsense, or talking sweet and talking broad in the Caribbean. Not only is wylers in tension with these bifurcations through its decolonial “opening” of an epistemic and ontological space, but it also presents an extension to decolonial theory, itself, that has largely conceived of epistemic coloniality and “decolonizing the mind” in terms of words and language. In SKN, and especially with regards to manners of speech, it is clear that words and sounds— the way people talk and the music they listen and move to— are inextricable. To this point, one of my survey respondents, in response to the question, “Do you think band music in St. Kitts-Nevis is too fast” said, “I would consider it significantly fast, perhaps a natural



progression/extension given how fast we actually talk (we really do chew on words).”<sup>321</sup> When Irving Barrett suggests that wylers is “too fast” in its constant appeal to sex and sexuality through its reference to “the iron” which, not incidentally, is also a musical reference to the instrument that marks the smallest, fastest, and most frequently occurring beat duration in big drum and masquerade rhythms, he is also referring to wylers’ untimely participation in SKN. This becomes more evident when considered in conjunction with the 1983 soca Lincoln Swanston wrote about the woman in diaspora who, among other connections to her Nevisian home, was looking for “a man to give she iron.”

In SKN, sounding too fast by pushing the tempo beyond 160 beats per minute and deploying auditory factors that signal fastness, utilizing a mixture of digital and acoustic instruments, and collapsing the boundaries of musical places of play and performance, opens sonic, epistemic, and physical space for moving and being “too fast.” Deploying too fastness via untimely participation in this way has the potential to mark certain spaces, times, and people that are deeply entangled in the colonial web of power, as decolonial through their connection to wylers. Colonial education, for example, that reinforced an understanding of musicianship and musics grounded in coloniality’s universalization of Enlightenment’s categories, is met with decolonial resistance by the untimely participation of wylers practitioners and producers.

The space of the schoolhouse, too, a longtime landmark in the musical history of SKN, also represents a space of youth gathering where impromptu imitation of wylers bands took place for Jamcrew and his peers in the mid 1990s. Irvinsia Warner, also, in voicing her grievance against sexually violent, and anti-woman practices in SKN, calls on

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<sup>321</sup> Steven Whittaker, Personal correspondence, May 12, 2013.

understandings of the physical space of the school, the imagery of the school girl, and the social space of colonial education and highlights its connection to coloniality's oppression of black women that is undergirded by capitalist and neoliberal regimes represented by the emphasis on the blackberry mobile phone in her calypso. The reach of neoliberalism's hand is further demonstrated by the very existence of the pageant as a competition that values the interplay between displays of global sensibilities and a keen and masterful familiarity with the local. That Irvinsia advocates for Kittitian-Nevisian young women at the Carnival Queen Pageant, foregrounds the necessary blurring of other links that occurs when the focus on one aspect of the colonial web of power is sharpened.

The decolonial potential I cite here, I would like to emphasize, does not dismiss or excuse what can most closely be described as misogynist lyrics in representative wylers songs as unproblematic. There is much to be said about the continued legacy of colonization and the pervasive power of coloniality by the fact that organizers for the Unity political party happily referenced the soca artist Pumpa's 2012 carnival song, "Massage (De Pum Nuh)," as a form of promotion for the political event billed as a celebration of unity, love, and respect for all KN citizens:<sup>322</sup>

Pumpa invites everyone to come out Thursday night and receive their massage therapy to break the stress from the politics, 'The JNF Hospital has already made sure the massage beds are well prepared, so if you're ready to come out and get ready to make your x and vote you have to come for your massage,' said Pumpa.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Within the lyrics of the song, Pumpa describes a scenario in which he has had particularly rough sex with a "one night stand." As a result of Pumpa's sexual bravado, where "beat it up like [he] was in a fight," the woman's genitals hurt and Pumpa offers to "massage the pump" and "touch it up."

<sup>323</sup> Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TeamUnitySKNYouth> Accessed 11 February 2015. It should be noted that Pumpa has promoted his song "Massage de Pum Pum," which received significant airplay during 2012 in the Virgin Islands, by suggesting that his performances relieve stress like a massage. This song, in

For KN women, it is not any one space or available mode of being— whether characterized by mores of colonial respectability, globalized professionalism, or sexually explicit “fast” behavior—that constitutes resistance or compliance. Instead, it is the continuous moving between them that creates a space of decolonial potential. Take for example the women caricatured in the Toon Center who dare to engage in physical mothering—gestating and breastfeeding— “in de dance.”

Coloniality as grounded in the legacy of colonization is the lens through which wylers sounds, actions, and movements are *perceived* as too fast. Through deployment of untimely participation as a decolonial aesthesis—sonic, linguistic, social, economic, sexual *fastness*—young, post-independence Kittitians and Nevisians avoid appeals to colonial notions of an African past or universal progress for legitimization. Instead, they recognize wylers as being “from the foundation,” irrespective of colonial and neocolonial notions of time (historical, chronological, or rhythmic) and national space. That wylers bands in the diaspora seek hotel accommodations instead of room and board in personal homes can be seen as way in which wylers musicians and music are not decolonial via a simple a reversion to grassroots or traditional ways. Wylers music, as an inescapable sonic force within St. Kitts Nevis, especially during carnival, activates the spaces in between music and language such that wylers is defined, at once, as “that boom boom in me head ‘ting,” and as a backward tilt of the hips. Wylers is the sonic context for decolonial being/moving/doing in St. Kitts and Nevis because it sounds from a place that embraces and values the contradictions and negotiations inherent to life on those tiny island.

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particular, was the topic of discussion on a talk show in the British Virgin Islands called “Speak Your Mind.” The show focused on the local debate regarding whether sexually explicitly songs should be censored or banned from radio play for the sake of underage listeners.

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